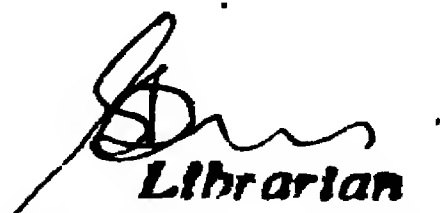








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***MEGHALAYA***



# ***MEGHALAYA***

**Dr. HAMLET BAREH**

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CHIEF MINISTER  
GOVERNMENT OF MEGHALAYA

Shillog, the 7th March, 1973 .

Dr. Bareh has kindly asked me to write a foreword to his book—'MEGHALAYA'. I could not do it soon enough as I would have liked because I could not find time to settle down to read the manuscript on account of the pressure of my work for our new-born State. As soon as I could manage it, I glanced at the contents first and was impressed by their range. Going through the book I found it touching upon the flora and fauna, climate and minerals, etc., of the land; the history of the people—the Khasis, the Jaintias and the Garos—the three main tribes of the State—their polity, mythology, culture, customs, laws, religion, social organisation, etc. The information on each of these subjects, if treated in detail, will not only be of great use to an administrator but of immense interest to Meghalayans in general and to all those who want to

know more about them in particular. But Dr. Bareh compresses them all within a book of 224 pages only though some may require a book or two for individual treatment in depth and substance. His efforts are commendable, and I hope he will pursue them further to diffuse more and more knowledge about our land and people.

Socrates said: 'Know thyself'. It is only when we know ourselves that we can advance and improve. Things done in ignorance, plans prepared without adequate and enlightened information are bound to go awry. In these days of planning for the development of the State, the welfare and progress of the people, it is most essential that we should have as correct data and full information as possible about the land and the people. We are still very much lagging behind in this respect in our infant State. I am glad to find that Dr. Bareh has made a good attempt to fill up this lacuna. Small though the book is, compared to its scope, I believe the author has taken great pains to collect, collate and compile all the information which he must have gleaned from various sources. I hope it will

spur him to greater endeavour, and others also who have the will, the strength and the talent to work for Meghalaya selflessly in this neglected field.

Dr. Bareh also gives in this book his views and conclusions on the present trends of the thinking of the people, their aspirations and struggles. Some may agree with him, some may not. These matters are always controversial, but have their value and significance for that very reason as they set people thinking and we do stand in need of more purposeful thinking as much as in doing good, solid work. Thomas Carlyle said: 'The latest gospel in this world is know thy work and do it'. This is most true for each one of us in our respective spheres. Let authors like Dr. Bareh write more books on Meghalaya and her people that we may know about ourselves better and thereby know our work and do our duty to make our State a veritable land of roses.

W.A. SANGMA  
Chief Minister  
Meghalaya





## **PREFACE**

The birth of Meghalaya along with other developments and the turn brought about in its present history, necessitates the type of this publication where vital subjects have been dealt with. Such a book is necessary to highlight the cultural heritage of the people in this fascinating land which abounds in rich folk-lore and mythology, rich historical events and democratic traditions, rich antiquities and other pristine institutions with its charming landscape and scenic beauty. The matrilineal organisation which exhibits, irrespective of its anomalies, is unique and offers a few parallels in the globe. Moreover, stress has been laid on the social changes with their repercussions in the country as on the basis of such study, realistic programmes may be drawn up towards social regeneration, cultural orientation and industrial awakening and causing innovations in other fields. The present social evils have to be examined to the core and practical remedial measures suggested to alleviate them.

Written with that incentive, the author wants this book, despite any shortcomings, to be of any possible use in the hands of social workers and educationists interested in the problems of the State as a whole. Re-awakening is intimately connected with re-discovery of the people while the result of such inquisition has to be properly assessed and utilised by specialists and scientists at various fields, to lay down constructive policies for building up a progressive State, enshrined in the vision and goal which the conscious citizens are pursuing up. The purpose for which this book is written may not be lost sight of. Our motto in this context is that leadership should be born, talents rightly canalised and fields of creativity restored at the national level.

Should the present transitory phase be a decisive factor in the destiny of Maghalaya, a consistent and uniform shape against its diverse form is the paramount need of the day, and worthy suggestions have thereby to be levelled to provide a nucleus for further accomplishments. Besides, this work is also intended to disseminate whatever possible information to the general readers about the salient features, but exhaustive treatment cannot be expected in such a small volume, especially.

when the book at this stage has been prepared to meet the immediate requirements only. More incentives need be imparted to researchers to follow up such study which concerns this infant state.

The bibliography includes a list of books consulted, but current news supplied by news reporters and the AIR have also been utilised in dealing with contemporary events. Among the Shillong newspapers, the *Implanter* has been found quite useful for its proper dissemination of news and creative evaluation as much as it applied to 1971.

I have tried to deal with all problems at some uniform level with special emphasis laid on Garo Cultural Heritage and History and Khasi-Jaintia Polity. A need has arisen to understand more about the different regional problems, in the light of the convergence of sociological, constitutional and historical processes, in relation to this great sub-continent as a whole. It is in this context that this study has been made.

Writing this book from scratch and confronted with many difficulties, certain printing errors are perchance unavoidable here and there for which I crave the indulgence of readers.

I regret that some delay has been caused towards the publication of this volume for certain unavoidable reasons, but the opportunity, at the same time, had properly been utilised to covering up all the important events upto the inauguration of North-eastern Council which constituted a new landmark in the constitution of the region as a whole.

I am most grateful to Captain W. A. Sangma for having kindly written a Foreword to this book in the midst of the heavy responsibilities he has been shouldering as the first Chief Minister of our new State, Meghalaya.

Hamlet Bareh.

---

Shillong,  
December 18, 1973

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Captain W.A. Sangma, Chief Minister, had been kind to write a Foreword in spite of the colossal works he was handling to guide the destiny of the new born State, and with the career left behind in the making of the State, he has been a great source of inspiration to the call that great, creative and worthy works should be strived at from all levels by the people of this generation in the task of building up the country. The love for the people should reflect itself in deeds not words with the incentive to bring about a richer life for our country. I hope my grateful thanks will be kindly accepted.

In presenting this book, I wish by way of courtesy to express my deep sense of gratitude to those persons from whom help has been obtained. I am grateful in particular to the Secretary of the APHLC in 1963, for the relevant papers on the Hill State which had been kindly supplied to me and for which one article gleaned from them was published in one of the journals in 1965.

Much about the Khasis and the Jaintias has, of course, been reconstructed from my works entitled *The History and Culture of the Khasi People*, *Khasi Democracy* in particular and others. The materials and data on the Garos obtain mostly from both the library and the field collection. The select bibliography at the end of the book shows a list of books consulted. I am grateful to the following—Messrs Skylance G. Momin, Jackson Momin, Wilson K. Marak, Bronson Sangma, R.G. Momin and H.W. Marak, for the assistance I received in checking up the spellings and providing supplementary information. Skylance spared his time during my brief visit to Tura to make me at home with the Garo educationists, highlighting the aspects of cultural heritage. I should acknowledge Prof. H. Saiborne for acquainting me with certain processes of cultivation on the southern Khasi border. A bulk of the material has been drawn as well from the various papers and articles I had prepared for the various journals and newspapers.

My grateful thanks again are due to Mr. Jackson Momin of the Tura Book Room for allowing me to use six illustrations

on the Garo Hills. It is the more pleasant to record hereby my sense of gratefulness to Mr. S.T. Samuel (Tariang), Umsohsun, Shillong for the cover design which I believe has been brought out with imagination and perception. I am grateful to Mr. H W. Sten, Editor, *Implanter* for the decision reached towards the publication of this book. Mr. V. P. Dhawan of the R. K. Printers, Delhi, may be mentioned for seeing to bringing out the volume within a short time.

The service rendered by Mr. Satish Kumar Arora, Stenographer, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, to cope with the transcription of notes and typing out the bulk of the final press copy was quite appreciable.

—HAMLET BAREH

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## GUIDE TO SPELLING

Khyrim	(Khai-rum)
Langrin	(Lang-grin)
Mawiang	(Mao-yang)
Mawphlang	(Mao-phlang)
Mylliem	(Mill-lyem)
Myriaw	(Mirr-iao)
Nongkhlaw	(Nong-khlao)
Nongstoin	(Nongston)
Shillong	(Shi-long)
Syiem	(Si-e-em)
Malngiang	(mal-ngi-ceng)
Synteng	(San-teng)
Nongthew	(Nong-thaw)
Iawbei	(Yeeiawbei)
Myntri	(Meantri)
Megam	(Me gam)
Achik	(A.Cheek)
Lyngdoh	(Lyngdooh)
Pukhleim	(Pukhlēn)
Pu niang hali	(Pu neeang hallee)
Iad	(Yeead)
Ing	(Yeeng)
Ing-sad	(Yeeng-sād)
Jainpien	(Jain-pen)
Hynniew	(Hyn-neeaw)
Syiar	(See-iar)
Suidnia	(Sooid nia)
Pansngiat	(Pan-seengeeat)

## ERRATA

<i>Page</i>	<i>Para</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Correct</i>
6	2	3	(Dudhnai Manda)	Dudhnai or Manda
8	2	3	edge	edges
9	3	1	Numerons	Numerous
10	1	2	abode	abodes
12	3	11	fete	feat
15	2	7	part	past
22	6	2	both	bottle
22	7	2	magnitite	magnetite
23	3	2	Physphates	Phosphates
30	2	14	fiance	fiancee
32	2	5	somh	some
32	4	6	earthern	earthen
33	2	14	is	was
35	4	2	exists	exist
41	2	10	aid	laid
45	2	6	bear	beer
60	3	2	who	which
65	2	21	weaving	sewing
66	3	1	the call	to call
66	4	7	places. Part	Places. Nishan- gram has part
67	2	6	plaints	plains
80	4	7	end	ends
88	3	1	pipes used	pipes are used
90	2	9	lichi	litchi
94	2	2	more	mere
98	2	14	intelligentria	intelligentsia
98	3	6	mantaneering	mountaineering
100	3	4	musicriologists	musicologists
102	4	1	curidition	euridition
102	5	16	way	ways
111	3	2	now	nay
117	4	9	then	delete
120	3	10	is	as
127	2	2	developed	devolved



<i>Page</i>	<i>Para</i>	<i>Line</i>	<i>Incorrect</i>	<i>Correct</i>
139	last	last	K . . . . . 119	trans to footnote 1, page 140
151	1	31	186'	1862
183	7	2	renavation	renovation
195	2	20	21st	22nd
199	5	2	market the	the market
201	2	5	empowerd	empowered
204	3	3	seems	seem
204	4	2	inherent	is inherent

## Chapter 1

### NOMENCLATURE

Meghalaya has an exciting nomenclature. Meghalaya, a Sanskrit word, means *abode of clouds*. Since the state was born, the region has come to be known by that name.

The difference between Meghalaya and the Himalayas is clear: the latter means the abode of the snow. We are aware that the snow-capped mountain summits are unfit for inhabitation of the people not acquainted with life in the snow, but the Himalayas have a blessing in disguise being the source for the world's largest and longest rivers which water the Indo-Gangetic and Assam valleys and bless the people with numerous crops.

The cloud obscures the landscape and dims the horizon to one's view. Thus it creates inner anxiety or drowsiness. But the mist floating upward, diffusing and enveloping the range has indirect blessing in giving support to the growth of the beautiful orchids, mushrooms, mosses and moistens the soil. The cloud discharges humidity and vapour. Mist in the hills usually intervenes between the rain and sunshine and vice-versa. Meghalaya itself is called after the cloud over-hanging at places such as Mawsynram, Cherrapunji, which record the heaviest rainfall, besides which these places are famous for pools and falls, rivers and streams. Conditions are similar in the Simsang valley located on the same rain-belt. To Wordsworth and other lovers of nature, the cloud imparts some lessons for life. The cloud is ephemeral and as it has passed away, the rainbow appears which lights up hope and joy to the world. This word, used in right perspective, has a constructive theme. It is worthy of note that *Wei-tdem*, a fall near Shillong means smoke off the fall and is vindicative of the conditions obtained from the hills.

Similarly, *Maikkasimram* on the Balpakram hill top, a Garo word, means cloud forming place.

Over the beauty of the wild sceneries, the plentiful forest, natural, mineral resources and other blessings which the Almighty has bestowed upon the people of the new-born State, attempts have to be made at all levels to enrich the life of the countrymen and women - spiritually, intellectually and culturally which in turn shall contribute to the nation as a whole. It is true that the rose adopted as the election symbol of the APHLC, is not only a sign of romance and beauty but enshrines the qualities, values and an inborn sense of creativeness, productivity, inventiveness, power, energy and calibre. Achievements, in many fields are, therefore, conjured in the vision of the leaders of the people of this infant State.

It may be appropriate to place below the following song<sup>1</sup> :—

1. Roses around the frontier,  
On the Hills above the Vale—  
We will bloom in our corner,  
Spreading scents beyond the pale.  
Visions of that State to be  
In the land so fair and free—  
What care we, though sweat and tears sweat  
Should become our guiding stars.
2. Dear native Peaks, by sunshine,  
Crowned in rosy hues divine—  
Take our all, we, to your call  
In our grand-sires' footsteps fall.  
Homeland's righteous flag to shine  
In our morning fresh sky-line—  
With hands and hearts to exchange  
For that glorious sight we range.

---

1. Words and tune by Victor G. Barch (issued by D.A.V.C., Khasi)

3. March, children of the ramparts  
To the beats of Highland hearts  
With our eyes to hea'enly goals  
Dreamland of our soaring souls  
Posterity's rosy way.  
Though some may not see its day—  
Meghalaya's opening page  
Will unveil our faith's image.
4. Farewell, oh glittering charms,  
Fetters of our hearts and arms;  
We our mountain core will pry,  
You your seashore beautify.  
Manure from the hills do flow,  
And the plains in fairness grow;  
Nature's course will unchanged be;  
We'll bless you in liberty.

## *Chapter 2*

### **THE LAND**

**Location and Physiography** – Meghalaya is a hilly region whose southern and western fringes border on Bangladesh. It is bounded by Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong Districts of the Assam valley on the north, by Bangladesh on the south, by the Mikir Hills and the North Cachar Hill Districts of Assam on the east and by Bangladesh on the west. It covers an area of 22,500 sq.kms. with the total population of 10,11,699 persons in the census of 1971<sup>1</sup>. The three districts in the State are Khasi Hills, Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills Districts.

The State is located west of Barail range which apex is situated in the eastern border of Jaintia Hills. The range introverts eastward into the North Cachar Hills where the Barail peak is located. From the Cachar Hills, the Barail throws its thrusts into southern Nagaland. The Japfu (Japvo) peak located near Kohima belongs to this system. From the southern extremity of the State, the outer range extends with gaps into Mymensing which constituted the southern traditional boundary line of Khasi States and the Garo Hills before the coming of the British administration. The northern region of the State is hilly, the foothills gradually lowering themselves before they merge into the Assam valley. The Khasi-Jaintia middle plateau is occasionally hemmed with valleys, flat lands and meadows which, therefore, does not abound in uniform steepish character of mountain terrain as in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh and Mizoram except that the southern Khasi-Jaintia extremity is precipitous abruptly terminating at the plain of Bangladesh. In the Garo Hills the Tura range

1. Approach to *Fifth Five Year Plan of Meghalaya*, p.2.

occupies a middle position running west to east where the Nokrek peak is located. The other parallel range in the north is Arbella. The Someswari range is the range which with Kylas lie towards the south-east of that District. Flanks of other ranges bisect each other in the country. According to the *Gazetteer of India*<sup>1</sup>, "the Tura range and the Simsang valley are the two most important physiographic units of this region. The Tura range extends from Tura to Siju, a distance of 50 kms. and contains the highest peaks of the Garo Hills<sup>2</sup>, Nokrek (1,412 m), Megongiri (1,283 m), Meiminram (1,196 m) and Gowangdara (1,011 m). It is a typical horst bounded by two fault lines. Along the northern fault line flows the Simsang river eastward for about 45 kms. before turning the Tura range from the Kylas range, and ultimately coming down to the plains near Baghmara. In the plain the river is called Someswari". The Tura peak lies east of Tura town but Nokrek is located more beyond the town

Among other hills, mention may be made of Pindengru located contiguous from the south-eastern portion of the district. Another peak located at this area is Chandodengga. Mention may be made of Jaksongram hill in the south. Chitmang in the south-eastern area appears to be next to Nokrek in altitude<sup>3</sup>. There is Aratacha-Ronggira peak on the north-east.<sup>4</sup>

In Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the ranges are intertwined with curved alignment, the east-west direction which the gentle spurs throw being more distinct on the central uplands. Spurs from middle region are imposing, the flat valleys lying athwart their base add to the charm of the country side. Some central tablelands viz. Smit, Swer and Mawphlang break through the

1. Vol. I, p. 22

2. Nokrek has three eminent peaks

3. Ranggira on the north-west of Tura is a peak which system seems to have introverted between Nokrek and Arbella

4 Elevation in feet—

Chit'mang	3,365 feet.
Pindenru	2,986 feet.
Aratcha Ronggira	2,562 feet.
Chandodenga	1,377 feet.
Jaksongram	1,206 feet.

(Rongmuthu, *Folk Tales of The Garos*, pp. 324-329).

Besides them, there are other minor peaks.

spurs to become entangled with the Cherra, Langkyrdem and Mawsynram platforms further south which impress themselves as the imposing mountain scenery. The highest plateau extends from Mawphlang to the Rapbleng hill. Spurs of ranges in Jaintia Hills are shorter in altitude than the Shillong plateau; hill bases lie side by side with flat lands, valleys and meadows which have for a great portion, converted themselves into wet-rice terraced and flat rice fields. Unlike the southern portion of Garo Hills dominated mostly by gentle slopes, the southern part of the Khasi-Jaintia hills is precipitous.

The Shillong peak and the Nokrek peak are the main watersheds of rivers flowing northward and southward. Damring (Krisi nai), Simsang (Someswari), (Dudhnai Manda), Ringgi, Bugi and Nitai are the principal rivers in the Garo hills. Damring rises south of the Tura range, flows northward and is finally mingled with the Brahmaputra in Goalpara District. At the plains it is joined by Dudhnai, an eastward parallel stream which converges it below the foothills, Ringgi another long river, rises north-east of Tura and flows north-westward across the terrain, till it leaves the District for the plain. The Ildek (Deosila) is another river on north-eastern side of the District. Bugi or Bhugai, an important river emerging from the Tura range, flows south and debouches the hills for the plain near Dalu in the southern extremity. Dareng (Nitai) also rises from the Tura range which flows southward leaving the hills for the plains west of Baghmara for Bangladesh. The Simsang is an important river which carries tributaries such as Rompa, Chima and Rongdik. The other southern rivers west of Dareng are Bandra, Sanda and Darong of inconsiderable length which emerge from the Tura range, many of which are mingled up in the plains.<sup>1</sup> The other two southern rivers are Mahadeo and Moheskali, the former rises from Balpakram and leaves the hills near Warima. The source of the latter is located from the same hill, it leaves the hills near Moheskhal.

The great earthquake of 1897 with its epicentre in the Khasi Hills, caused dislocation in certain features of physiography especially in the western and southern zones of

1. Chibok which means *white water*, washes the central plateau. The Chibok fall is renowned as the most beautiful fall. (Rongmuthu, *Folk Tales of The Garos*, p. 349).

Meghalaya. Many old rivers dug out new channels as a result of the convulsions in the earth's surface. This also occurred in the Garo Hills, when during that earthquake, one of the old deserted beds of the Damring turned into a big lake. People at that time took this event as a rare phenomenon.<sup>1</sup>

The principal river, debouching the hills, increase on and become large when tributaries join them. At certain places, they are navigable in which rafts, canoes and boats of indigenous workmanship are floated. The drainage on the south has greater discharges owing to the heavy downpours. On the hills, rivers introvert between the softer landscape and take zig-zag and angular bends when facing the higher cliffs. Lakes and pools are many owing to the heavy rains.

The land abounds in streams and rivers. The rivers which rise from the Shillong peak are Umiām Mawphlang or Wah Shella or Rupa Tylli (known in Bangladesh as Bogapani) and Umngot or Dowki, both flowing southward into Bangladesh. Mynkhen also rises from the same peak and flows north-eastward into Jaintia Hills where on its eastward edge, debouches the hills for the Brahmaputra valley. Kynshi is a western river, which rises near Sohiong and first flows westward where on its western edge, receives tributaries such as Umblei and Rilang of considerable size, and from the junctions, flows south-eastward into Bangladesh where it changes its name into Jadukata<sup>2</sup>. Wahummawpa is its tributary which rises near Sohiong, contiguous to Shillong plateau. Another river, Umiām Khwan flows eastward, and then northward, before leaving the hills for the Assam plains. The northern river on the west is Khri Synnia

1. The Garos believe that serpents dwell in the river beds and that when they leave their abode, the river changes its channel and go by a new diversion. The eastern part of Garo Hills was very much effected and a great damage was done to village buildings and the fields during the earthquake. Large cavities were formed in rocks and cliffs and rivers dug new channels

2. Kynshi, Dareng and Simsong (Garo Hills) are rivers of great cultural and commercial importance. Many boats ply on them. Big catches of fish are made by fishermen from over the boats with their nets. The rivers afford fishing centres where on the banks, various techniques are used. From here, fish is distributed to other places. In the past, tradition has it that Khasi Kings and Garo Rajahs offered joint sacrifice on the river in which large herds of goats were cut followed by dances and sports. It is no longer performed.

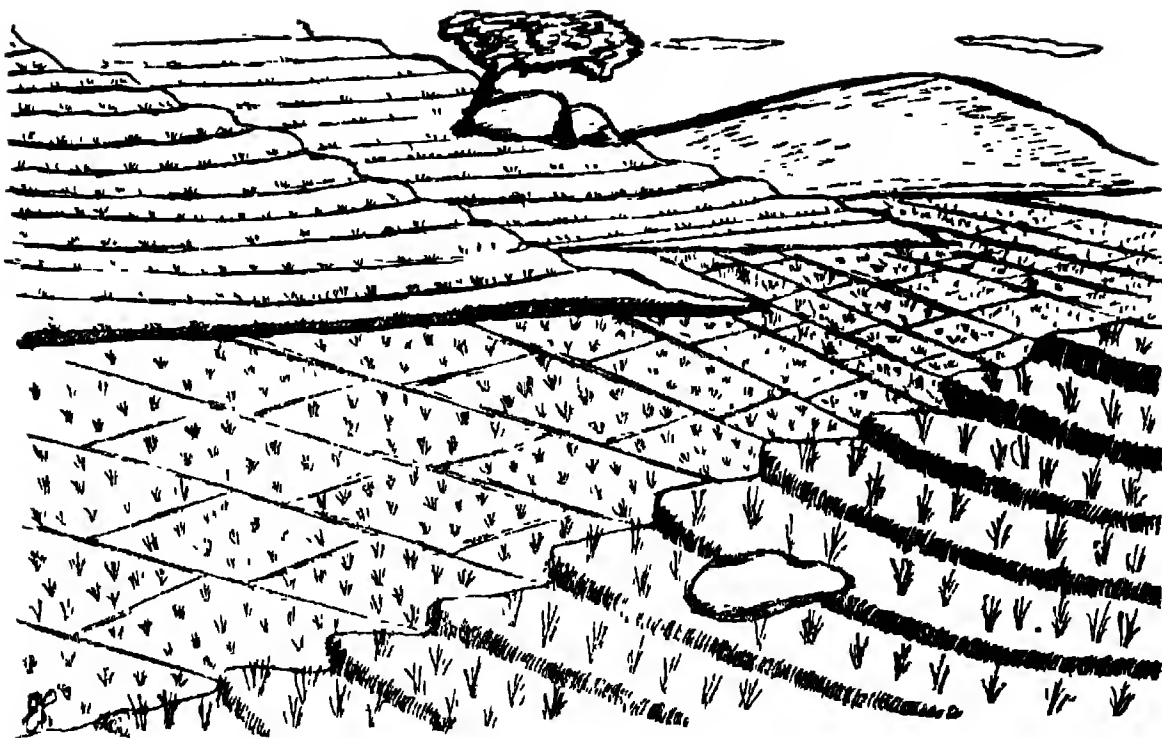


which rises from the Kyllang peak whose tributary is Khri with its spring near Laitdom. The Umtrew river which flows past Byrni on the Shillong-Gauhati road rises from the Sohpetbneng peak. From a watershed in Jaintia Hills emerge the eastern rivers which fall into the Kupli, the latter being a traditional boundary line between the District and the north Cachar Hills District. Kupli rising near the eastern boundary flows northward and is joined by Umiurem, Myntang and Mynriang, thereby becoming another large river. The other southern rivers such as Rew, Myntdu, Prang and Lukha do not flow for a longer distance as in the case of Kynshi or Umngot. The northern rivers flow northward into Kamrup and Nowgong to be finally mingled with the Brahmaputra.

The rivers, as a rule, are torrential. They follow the direction of ridges. They form waterfalls along the precipitous edge of sheer beauty, the waters ejecting out with great velocity. In limestone areas on the southern extremity, fishes of good flavour are obtained. At places, they are navigable, boats loaded with fruits, crops and timber are seen as boats are used for carrying transport and traffic in the heavy business centre<sup>1</sup>. Extensive sand-banks along these rivers lie interspersed with quartz, pebbles, shingles and perhaps fossiliferous matter. The swollen rivers carrying erode matter, rush with great speed during the rainy season. The water turn bluish crystal clear near the southern extremity but rivers on the north, have less discharge, and a few seem to be in stagnant mood during the winter season owing to want of velocity.

The Umiam Hydro-electric project installed twelve years ago or so with a power generator from the Umiam river located at Umsaw.Khwan on the Shillong-Gauhati road, has obliterated the old terraced grounds, paddy fields, vegetable farms, valleys and old village sites, and in their place has emerged a lake at the dam site which has a soothing effect upon the observer against the background of the fringes of ranges and hills. It is administered by the State Electricity Board. The project is so designed to provide electric power to nearby and distant places. Besides,

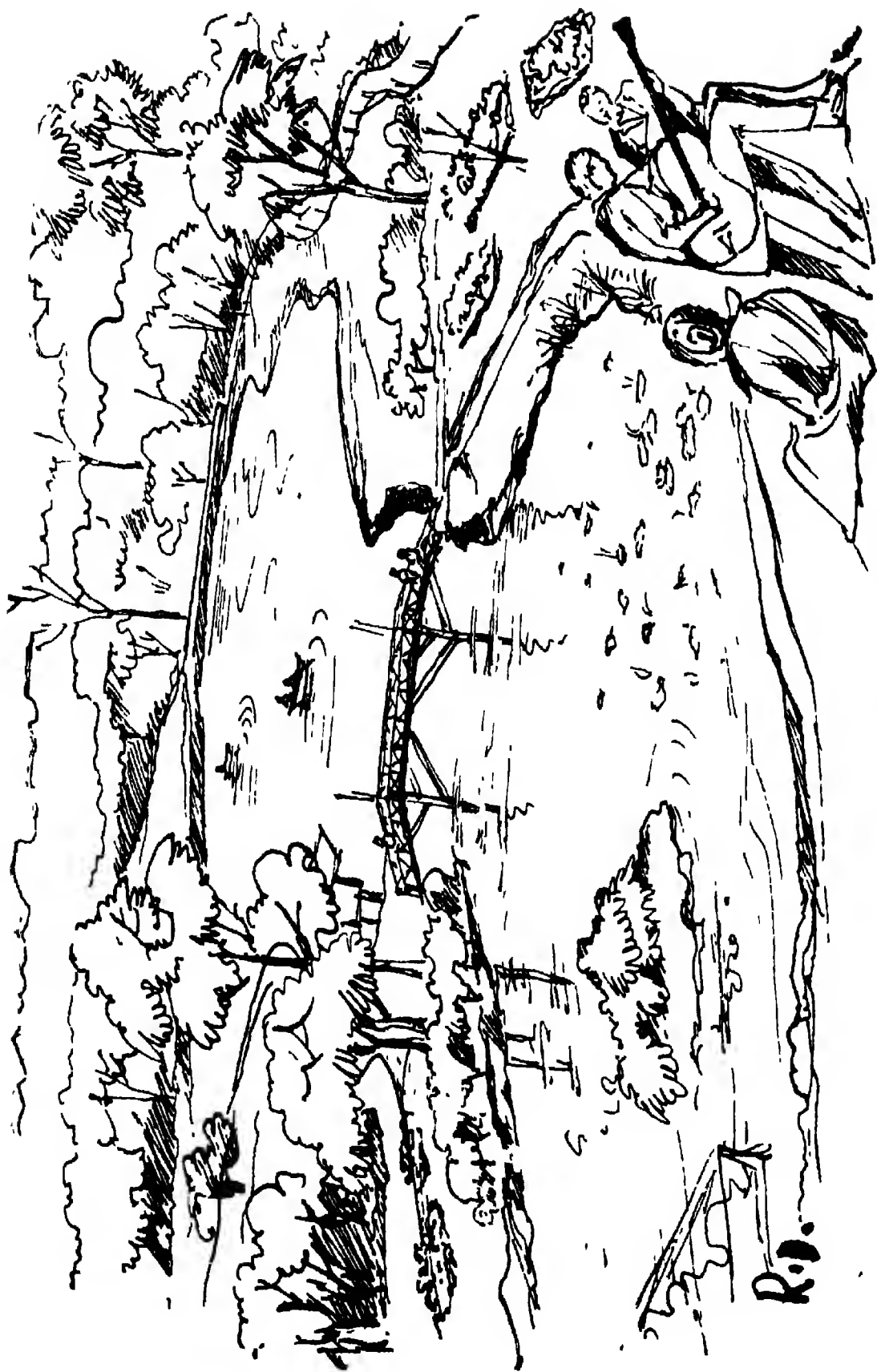
1. Riverine civilisation has sprung along the important rivers such as Kynshi, Simsong, Umngot and Shella. There is more canoe building on the first two rivers. Garos turn out dug-out at Simsong river from timber. The people have bamboo, cane and wooden rafts mainly.



**The Paddy Terracing Grounds**



**Beauty Spots**



R.D.

Ward's Lake, Shillong

there is an Umtru hydel project further north near Byrnihat on the Shillong-Gauhati road. The traditional story which attaches cultural and economic importance to the rivers, has not obliterated yet with time's passage; but with the generation of electric power, the waters have become the illuminating force too in these days of technological advancement.

There is a number of waterfalls in the State. Tourists and travellers into the State are aware of the falls in and around Shillong and Cherrapunji. The falls at Shillong are the Bishop's falls, Elephant falls, Spread Eagle falls, Crinoline falls, Beadon falls, and the Sweet falls. Near Cherrapunji are the Dainthlen, Nohsngithiang, Risaw-Mawtyngkong, Umsaw and Urmasi, Nohkalikai, Wakhaba, Iapkhnei and Latara. The Iale, Myntriang, Tyrshi and Ryingki are famous falls in Jaintia Hills. Some of the waterfalls not yet mentioned in the Geography have, however, come to notice. One is Kshaid Mawklor, situated about six miles from Mawsynram on the Mawdon Bazar Road where two rivers converge at that fall. Weisynthai is another fall near Tyngnger village cloved by a crag into two channels and the waters joined below dig out a deep and big pool. The Umrem fall near Mawlong on Shella Bazar Road which flows down the cliff has also its waters clove and again joined near the bottom of the fall.

Numerous rock-caves are obtained from various places especially on the southern region <sup>1</sup>

The Garo landscape, broken up by rising precipices and ravines, has a number of waterfalls. The most famous are the falls of Khanchrurisik, Mokma, Rongbang, Chibok, etc. They are

<sup>1</sup> Caves well known in Khasi-Jaintia Hills are Lumlawbah (Cherrapunji), Mawsynram and Syndai. They are many miles long, full of water splashes. There are many images such as household furnitures, racks, cots, tables and platforms all in stone. The Garo rock caves on the right bank of Chibe, Dobakkol, Derang Era Aning, Durokma are also wonderful and provide a panoramic view of mysteries which lay half concealed in nature. The rock caves of bats near Siju village where a great number of bats dwell is one of the wonderful known caves in the world. Stone structures inside the caves in their natural form are thrilling in which one would imagine to have seen large halls, stages, corridors, utensils and large lanes of water scattered inside the caves. The entrance to Mawsynram cave is near a fall with sand banks around the pool at its base in which fairies come out and dance at midnight.

of sheer beauty, located in picturesque spots which evoke some phenomena as being the favourite abode of nymphs and fairies. Most as the eminent ones are located on the southern region. The most famous of them are Mrig, Warima, Redingsa. There are many awe-looking pools of certain depth and expanse. These do not escape the imaginative and fertile mind of the ancient Garo bards and story-tellers who invented many tales about their mountains and rivers, the diverse images of nature. Some tales are recounted from the experience of heroes and adventurers who visited them.

Both the Garos and Khasis have preserved many interesting stories about their mountains. The captivating Shillong peak (1,966 m) is believed to be an abode of the benevolent Shillong god; this god wrought many victories upon the evil spirits and had under his control, large herds of elephants which served him as his messengers and ministers. He founded the famous Shillong kingdom (comprised of modern Myllem and Khyrim States) and gave to his people great and powerful kings. His daughter Ka Pah Syntiew was the first queen of that kingdom and Shillong her son, the first king. He vanquished a serpent spirit *uthlen* which sought to make the Khasi race extinct. The Kyllang and Symper rocks are believed to be the twin brothers, but time came when they quarrelled and fought with each other; the Symper when defeated, retreated southward to the site where its peak is now located.<sup>1</sup> The Kyllang rock emerges as solitary mass of granite and forms a great cliff in Nongkhlaw State.<sup>2</sup> Both Sohpetbneng and Diengiei peaks are connected with the origin of the race; Sohpetbneng top is believed to have had a ladder which rose upward to the sky when the celestial beings known as Khyndai Trep or nine huts from their heavenly abode kept contact with *Ki Hynniew Trep* or the seven huts or households, ancestors of the Khasi people. Diengiei is connected with a fabulous tree of evil growing over the top of that hill which brought about an abrupt end of communication between the heaven and the earth. Lum Mawlong Syiem and Longkrem near Cherrapunji are believed to be abode of the rock deities who bear the name of peaks. The deity of Swer peak, located midway on Shillong-Cherra road,

1. 5,700 feet in elevation.

2. 5,684 feet altitude.

has been attributed to have extended help in the formation of a Kingdom viz Sohra Syiemship. Iawpaw peak is connected with a female deified spirit, Ka Iawpaw, sometimes described to be a melevolent spirit. Lum Iakor Singh in Jaintia is named after an ancient Syiem Iakor Singh while Lum Pah Bo Bah Kong is called after his appearance of the mother carrying a baby. From over these peaks, one can obtain a majestic view of valleys and ranges scattered at different directions and on the edges of the horizon, the plains of Assam and Bangladesh and a number of rivers running for their unknown destinations through them.

Most peaks, ranges and gorges clothed with evergreen vegetation where the human hands have not yet touched them, yield orchids, wild flowers and botanical resources of great variety.

Garos legends recount the origin of streams, pools, waterfalls, ravines, hills and mountains. Some of the events perpetuated on the folk-tales have been ascribed local value; others corroborate the experience, adventures and struggle of their forefathers during their ancient migration in to their present land. Their stories which centre on mountains, streams, pools and falls are interesting as Khasi and Jaintia tales are.

Interesting Garo tales have been collected on the special phenomenon from the landscape. The Balpakram hilltop in the southeast was the abode of *Natapa*, the king of death being known as *Mebit Mepang Natapani Begun* after his garden. Now it has become a deserted abode of ghosts. Chitmong hills<sup>1</sup> is described as a halting place of the spirits of dead persons before embarking on journey to the permanent world here-after. In Garo tales, mention is made of *Mat'hadus* (a cannibal race of tiger men) who dwelt on the summit of Mongie hill. The Garo warriors fought with them and drove them to extinction. On the Ranggira summit, Misi Apalpa Saljong taught their fore-fathers about paddy cultivation. Rongram rock spirit dwelt in a Rongram rock in which people use to appease him by offering sacrifices of cocks, pigs and fowls on the site of the rock known as Rongram Kitram. Koasi goddess, the queen of tigers and tigresses lives on the Koasi hill summit in

1. Chitmong lies contiguous to Balpakram. *Chitmong* means separating the body from the soul body.

the north-east.<sup>1</sup> Misi Kokdok rock which literally means six basketfuls of maize is the site where the ancient cultivators during their first stage of settlement used to collect six basketfuls of maize and an equal weight of paddy from their cultivation. The story recounts that a first batch of Ambeng colonists set foot on the Arbella hill top before they were scattered into the various directions of their present country.

There are many lively tales connected with their falls and pools. Redingsi *Wari*, a pool on the Khalkija stream, is being remembered as a resort of Gonga who lingered on and indulged himself in various games, bathing, swimming and diving in the pool. A root of cotton tree felled by him with the help of a god of storms, Japatchongsi, still remains to be seen on the bank. The waters of Re.nang Dare contain medicinal propensity and many wounded and sick bathing in it, were cured. A few pools are dreaded as being abodes of malignant spirits who cause insanity and lethargy to the intruders. The Mokma Dare on the north-east is believed to be the abode of Mokma god.<sup>2</sup>

Garó folk-tales have wide range of meaning. They are connected with religious beliefs, natural phenomenon and supernaturalism; some are metamorphic. They recount the influence bore by fairies, rock and water spirits, subterranean spirits upon the life of the A chiks. All wonder looking sites and images of nature are enlivened with cultural symbols. They have descriptive poetry of the beauty which radiates from the motifs of nature, the wild flowers and plants, ferns, mushrooms, herbs and weeds that remain verdant throughout all the seasons of the year. They also have several epics on the exploits and acts of fete of their extra-ordinary men of prowess. Some hill-side villages are known to be the cradle of Matchi and Ambeng warrior clans described to be invincible from the of tales of the past.

The nomenclature which rivers in Khasi carry, highlights the traditional and cultural beliefs and thinking. *Umiam* literally means weeping. *Umblei* means a divine water. *Rilang* means keep together, but it is perhaps more appropriate to suggest that it is the river named after *Lang*, the ancient mother of the royal house in the west. *Myntdu*, *Myntang* and *Umiurem*

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1. *Koasi* after Bengali means mist. In Garó, *Koasi* means a sacrificial stone.

2. *Folk—tales of the Garos*, pp. 308-343.

centre round *Ka Tdu*, *Ka Tang* and *Ka Rem*, described in the legends to be the water deities who roamed once about in the Jaintia Hills, and having found the land barren, burst themselves out into three rivers. Jowai itself is the gift of Myntdu. Khyrwai called *Wah Syiem*, is connected with the origin of the Jaintia Syiems<sup>1</sup> in the form of one water nymph who emerged from the stream, and became the first queen. Kupli is associated with the Kupli goddess and Iale, her son who were appeased with human sacrifice in the past. A tradition says that *Umngot* is called after the ancient mother *Ka Ngot*. Rivers in Khasi carry the feminine gender. Many stories centre round the race engaged by the *Umngot* and *Myntdu* as well as *Kynshi* and *Umiam-Shella* to reach first the plains.

According to the Garos, water spirits from their domains, regulate the volume of water and attribute the nature and extent of the crops, vegetation and plantation sustained on by the rivers and the spirits decide upon the type of vegetation containing medicinal propensity, nutritious values and timber tree to be localised in each area.

*Vegetation*—ranges from tropical to temperate. Dense jungles still clothe the higher summits which abound in wild life. Many good jungles have felled, in view of jhum (slash-and-burn system of cultivation) largely prevalent. Besides the valuable timber tree, medicinal plants, hard and soft wood and other types are found.<sup>2</sup> Sal is the most important forest product which out-turn in large quantity is transacted outside. The higher altitudes near the springs of rivers contain orchids and wild plants of beauty. Bamboo in Garo Hills is plentiful.

The northern region of the State has fine variety of Sal trees, broad and rich in Garo Hills and mid-western Khasi Hills, but going eastward, they are reduced into scattered sal sapplings sometimes admixed with scrubs and trees or *ajhar*, the latter grade being more evident towards Nowgong while the

1. Syiem is a king.

1. Among others, the following are included—Sal, teak, birches, schimas, beeches, magnolia, nahor, champa, titasopa, gamari, bogi poma, tja poma, mekai, cham, simul, etc. There is a variety of medicinal herbs and plants viz. asparagus, vallerina ballichi, rubia khasiana, cassia fistula, cherata, smilex, ipecac, arjuna, terminalia, etc. (*Meghalaya Year Book*, 1972, p. 66).



western and central zone present good quality. The Khasi pine (*Pinus insularis* or *pinus Khasiya*) is well known and dominates the upper region in Khasi-Jaintia Hills. It yields resiniferous products, while both the tree and boughs are put to some use by the local people. To make good the loss of pine locally consumed, people have indigenous system of this tree plantation annually in the Jaintia Hills. Pine dominates the elevation of 3,000 to 5,000 ft. but as a rule, it does not go below 2,400 ft. or above 6,000 ft. In Garo Hills bamboo of some variety thrives as much as in the central Khasi and Jaintia Hills, the pine is a principal tree. Chestnut trees, oaks, fir and berries are come by in the upper region. The Khasi Hills temperate forests lie in patches near water courses and springs and sometimes where pine has been cut down and grown no more, grasslands with little undergrowth are seen in place of the old groves. Khasi Hills are further known for flora of infinite variety which spring near Shillong, Cherrapunji, Mairang and other places. Yet Garo Hills also have collection of rich plants and wild flowers. Vegetation varies according to the topographical formation all over the State, hill tops demonstrating their own pattern, swampy marches presenting their own, while precipitous sides exhibiting another variety. Shillong, Jowai and other centres form the timber stations from where sawn timber, planks, posts, furniture are distributed in considerable volume for local use. The exploitation of forest requires careful handling for giving long term reserve and minimising wastage.

Garos are good wood-carvers. Cane and bamboo profuse in the district and northern Khasi Hills is put into multifarious use. The people in the State turn out stools, mats, trays, baskets, and containers from bamboo. They make strings from its skin and robes from the creeper plants. They produce other motifs. They use the leaves as fodders for horses and cattle. Bamboo finds good use at house constructions, building of platforms and as festival symbols. It is used as pillars for a funeral pyre. It is used for fencing, bridge construction and modelled into various designs and fixtures. It is used as fishing rod and trap and as imitation weapon for children.

Wild flowers and plants are valued. They have decorative use. Those with scent are used as camphor and are treasured with the costume in the box. Tubers, mushrooms, roots, wild vegetables are edible and serve as condiments. Some are eaten

raw and others prepared into curry. Medicinal plants and herbs are many in which medicine men make an earning. Medicines are prescribed for various complaints—dysentery, ulcer, influenza, malaria, skin diseases, sprains and fractures. Now hospitals, dispensaries and health centres and modern physicians handle the majority of cases. There are aconite and viruluous plants and herbs of great use. 200 varieties of orchids are reported at these places - Balpakram hill, Simsang Valley, Baghmara side and Nokrek range.

Constant felling of jungle has proved disastrous to the local economy. Forest is a source of fuel and timber, a nuclear of wild life, a soothing green spot and the giver of rain. Experience has shown that indiscriminate felling of forest at various places on the suburbs of Shillong during the decades gone for the rehabilitation of groups of persons and other residents, has deprived the town of its part majestic grandeur and has rather made the climate hotter and more arid. Today a large number of pine groves has disappeared from the town. The congestion in the town has presented health problems. Many Municipality Wards have been deprived of adequate water supply and water problems have been of great dimension. Fresh water supply projects from more distant places are not only expensive but would be difficult for execution being connected with acquisition and requisition problems upon which the land owners should agree. This was the antecendental background which should give the present or future experts the experience that in any expansion scheme of township, due regard has to be made on water feasibility project which shall be consistent in the long run. Besides, the wanton destruction of forests has posed problems such as shortage of arable lands and timber and caused frequent movements of farming communities. Tree plantation may help to restore a portion of the forests fell out and replinshed and a restricted or improved pattern of jhum cultivation may also be devised to avoid indiscriminate felling.

*Fauna*—the State is rich in wild life; the fauna is of wide range and number. The ancient people lived on games which sustained the life of man with energy and prowess. The axe of man reached the thick jungle and time came when large groves were felled for the purpose of cultivation. Timber was necessary for various household purposes. The inhabitation of

selected places, the founding of villages, the organisation of economy, these and other factors, reduced the number of fauna and the indiscriminate killing drove to extinction some of the finest species in context of the situation that the games were essential not only for the purpose of meat which they provided but also hide and skin, horns, tusks and other constituents which man's instinctive faculty put them to various uses. Hunting and shikari still provide very good sports to the modern generation.

Among the animals found close to human inhabitation, mention may be made of elephants, apes and monkeys, deers and sambar, elephants come out during the winter time on the northern foothills and at many places in the Garo Hills. On several occasions, they are seen in herds by the villagers. Garos set traps to various animals around the villages. To Garos, elephants are captivating, the people having some techniques of catching them. Monkeys stay on fringes of the grove but not in the interior jungle areas. Different deer tribes, sambar and hare are located at different altitudes. True wild life in the jungle comprises the tigers, leopards, wild pigs, wild buffaloes, wolves, mithuns, bears, etc. and varies to squirrels, musk-rats, pangolins, antelopes and others. The major tribes take up their respective lairs and come around the jungle in search of the meat of smaller prey but a few of them live on fruits, herbs and vegetables.<sup>1</sup> Rhinoceros appears now to have been extinct or rare. Birds and wren are plenty. Pheasants, jungle fowls, wood-cocks, cotton teal geese, plower snipes, quails, spot bills, whistling teals are common. Peacocks, partridges, pigeons, horn-bills, mynas and parrots are also found. They take up their spheres in thickets, shrubs and bushes. Besides there are other uncountable number of birds and fowls. Some of them use to migrate in a flock from one place to another and some choose permanent abode. Crows are not too many as in the neighbouring plains. Herds of animals such as leopards and tigers, I have been told, use to come into some places in Garo Hills from Bangladesh before they migrate into Assam through northern Khasi Hills area. The State, therefore, exhibits some types of Bengal and Assam fauna apart from indigenous.

1. The Tuta range shelters the wild buffaloes and wild pigs. The royal Bengal tigers are met on the foothills.

2. H. W. Sten, *Meghalaya Year Book*, 1971 and 1972.

Some animals, pigeons, woodcocks and other birds, are seen in the Government reserved forests where hunting is prohibited, but the most vigorous ones are confined in jungle clad hills and mountain summits. The government has taken steps to educate the public about preservation of wild life and forests. More animals are found in Garo Hills.

*Climate*—owing to the range in elevation, climate varies from place to place. The climatic conditions range from sub-tropical to semi-temperate. The Shillong plateau being higher than Tura,<sup>1</sup> the former's climate is more pleasant. The Garo Hills District has hot summers and pleasant winters. The climate of Tura is like that of the northern Khasi foothills adjoining the Kamrup plains, the place is malarious. The temperature slides down upon the higher altitudes. The Simsang valley in Garo Hills, as an exception, has the most pleasant climate. The uplands of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills have a salubrious climate characterised by warm summers and cold winters. Foothills of the State on the north and south share the climate of the neighbouring plains, hot and damp in summer. Climatic variations are shown as follows :

<i>Place</i>	<i>Average Maximum in April</i>	<i>Average Minimum in January</i>
Garo Hills	34°C	4°C
Khasi-Jaintia Hills	24°C	12°C

The wettest places in the globe are located in Meghalaya, Cherrapunji and Mawsynram being the rainiest places. The two places are racing with each other to reach the top, Mawsynram having taken the lead occasionally but never exceeds Cherrapunji, hitherto renowned as being the rainiest place. The highest precipitation would have totalled 10,415 mm. or even more in either of the two places.

Syndai and Mo-te-le-knup<sup>2</sup> known to be the wettest places in Jaintia Hills have not shown any rainfall record. Southern

1. Tura is 1,300 feet altitude whereas Shillong is about 5,000 feet high. Nokrek peak is 4,652 feet whereas Shillong peak is 6,445 feet high from the sea-level.

2. The etymological significance of Mo-te-le-Knup is three stone rain shades or umbrellas called after the heavy downpours in this area.

Garo Hills lie in the same rain belt and should have received high precipitation. The rainy season starts from April and is over in September or middle of October. Heavy downpours some times at Cherra or Mawsynram continue at a stretch for 14 days without break. Hail stones during the month of March or April inaugurate the rainy season of the year.

The gales occur during the spring time. The sky is overcast during the down-pours and fog envelops the shadowed areas such as Cherrapunji, Simsang valley, Syndai, Langkyrdem, etc.

*Geology*—the geological structure of the Garo Hills varies from archæan on the north (exhibiting bands of calc-granite, amphibolites, magnetite-hematite quartzites) to Lower Gondwana (of sandstones and carbonaceous shales with lenticles of coal) located about the middle region and to the lower tertiary sediments (of Sylhet sandstones and upper Sylhet limestone members) on the south. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills exhibit larger variety comprising archæan rocks, admixed with lenses of quartz-biotite-sillimanite-cordierite rocks and quartz-sillimanite rocks which at places are associated with the granite gneisses. Gneissic complex is overlain by the Shillong series, the quartzites are admixed with conglomeratic and micaceous elements interspersed with schists, horn-blende schists, chlorid schists, granulites and amphibolites, with occasional bands of shale and slate. A section of rocks known as Khasi Greenstones formed from the exposure of epidiorite, the amphibolite and hornblende schists is admixed with granite veins. The other kind is porphyritic granite which forms batholiths, plutons, bosses, etc. The Sylhet trap predominates in the southern escarpment of the Shillong plateau comprising dark blue to black basalt. Further south cretaceous rocks are observed admixed with archæan fault, boulders belt, coarse, massive ferruginous, glauconitic and calcareous sandstones, shales and limestones in alternate successions. The Eocene mainly represented by the Jaintia group shows the variety of thick sand stones and shales and yet with thin beds of carbonaceous shales and iron stone. It is believed that this ancient land was submerged by the encroaching sea during the Mesosaic and early tertiary time and was uplifted slowly from the bed of the sea at the time that the Himalayas rose from the floor of the tethys.

*Economic Geology*—Garo Hills is rich in mineral deposits. The most valuable minerals comprise coal, feldspars, glass-sands,

gypsum, iron ore, limestone, pyrites, phosphates and clay. Coal in this area is admixed with the sand stone scattered near Tura, Rongrenggiri, Darangiri and Siju. The seams from west Daranggiri and Siju with an estimated reserve of 127,000,000 tonnes for an area of 50 sq kms and 118,000,000 tonnes for 65 sq kms respectively is of good quality. The deposits are found extending on the valley of Simsang river but this belt extends eastward into the gorges of the Nongstoin State. Rongrenggiri is said to contain 2 thin seams covering an area of 65 kms.

Felspars for industrial use are located near Tura, Anogiri, Gengjalgiri,<sup>1</sup> Santhagiri,<sup>2</sup> Chisakgiri and certain other places. There are deposits of glass-sand near Siju and other places.

Gypsum located at Tarapara, Meringgipara and Mogopara is found in small crystals lying in the shale beds and small scattered patches in the shale. Limestone lies along the southern flank of Tura range from Athambing, running through Siju, Dapsi, Darugiri and advancing near Damalgiri. The Simsang valley is said to contain thin isolated deposits of limestone. Much smaller deposits occur around Darang Era Aning. In addition to the above, phosphatic nodules occurring in Bandarigiri are obtained from the dark grey shales. The nodules vary from light grey to dark with different ingredients. As much as we know the vast potentials have hitherto been unexploited yet. Perhaps lime, but in a very limited degree, has recently been excavated.

The Khasis maintain that valuable minerals such as mica, gold, silver, rubbies, and oil lie scattered in the bosom of their land. There are stories told of gold washing out of sand at the Umiam river below the Mawphlang hill and the collection of diamonds . . . Jaintia Syiems possessed a large number of gold mohurs and ornaments which were largely distributed to the Dalois annually. Traditions however state that the Jaintia and the other Syiems possessed gold mines of their own. A particular tradition describes one gold mine which was excavated by a Bhoi Syiem near Umden. Excavation of copper was important at Nongstoin; copper was largely used for the manufacture of pots, cups and vessels. The Khasis in the past

1. Read Jengjalgiri.

2. May better be spelled Senthagiri.

had used their own methods for melting copper. Excavation of copper was also undertaken at Laitiam in Cherra Syiemship. Even mica was excavated in large quantities and sold to the plains by the people . . . This valuable mineral was used largely for decorative purposes during the festivals in the plains area.

The geological survey has classified the minerals as follows :—

(a) *Clay*—White clay located at three places near Sohrarim on Shillong-Cherra road: smaller pockets exist around Sutnga and Shangpung further east.

(b) *Fire clay*—near Jowai whereas good plastic clays are recorded around Larnai with a considerable estimated reserve of about 5,000 tonnes.<sup>1</sup>

(c) *Kaolin*—applicable for ceramics and clay represents fine, pure and white type reported in and around Sutnga. Sometime it is admixed with Cherra sandstones or felspars in gneisses or granites while that reported from near north-east of Laitkseh is iron stained. The deposit near Mawphlang is interspersed with weathered granite and pegmatites and high percentage of silica.

(d) *Lithomarge*—recorded between Nongryngkoh and Myntrang and near Kupli-Khar-Kor junction.

(e) *Beauxitic*—in a thin deposit reported near Bapung on the Jowai-Badarpur road.

*Coal*—which deposits are located at Umrilang area, Mawbeh Lakhar, Sohrarim, Shyrmang, Bapung, Jarain, Rymbai, Sutnga, Kynden Tuber, Lakasein, Umte, Garampani-Kharkor, Mawsynram, Shella-Mawlong, Cherrapūnji, Laitryngew, Pynur-sla, Lakadong, Lumshnong, Tenglah, East Darrangiri and Langrin or Umblei area. The Um Rilang has an estimated reserve of about 1,000,000 tonnes in the lower 1.5 m. thick seam thick while Mawbeh Lakhar has in its case a thin seam of much more poorer quality coal, similarly Sohrarim is exposing 0.6 to 1.0 m. thick seam; so Shyrmang exhibits the lower 0.6 m. thick

1. Pottery was an important industry localised around these places in the past.

seam, Bapung a lower thick seam of 0.3 to 1.0 m. thick yielding 6,000,000 tonnes comprised within 15 sq kms. The rest of coal field in the Jaintia Hills comprised at Jarain, Rymbai, Sutnga, Kynden Tuber as far as Umte and Garampani-Kharkor has to be assessed as to its reserve capacity. The local people think the deposits stretch in a belt of 44 km long athwart Mawstem, Pyrma, Pamra, Sutnga, Nongkhlieh and Lakadong located eastward.

1. Mawsynram—with the lower seam of 1.2 m thick and the upper seam of 0.3 m thick. The Mawdon coal field is also included in this group.

2. Shella-Mawlong—this belt comprises Shella, Sohbar, Disong, Mustoh, Mawlong with 0.3 to 2.1 m seam thick but located on the precipitous slopes and causing hindrances to a large-scale exploitation on the sound economic footing.

3. Sohra—since the lower seam of 0.9 to 2.7 m thick has been replenished, the upper seam of 0.2 to 0.3 m thick remains yet to be worked out.

4. Laitryngew—which spreads over an area of 30 sq kms but has mainly 0.3 to 1.0 m thick with the lower, upper and middle seams at Rngi mawsaw, Mawkabor, Mawkma and Laitlyngdop. The reserve yielded by Cherrapunji-Laitryngew is estimated at about 18,000,000 tonnes.

5. Pynursla—two of the five seams contain good coal from 0.75 to 0.9 m. thick with an approximate reserve of 1,125,000 tonnes while Thanjinath hill located more southward, exposes a lower 1.0 m. a middle 1.5 m. and an upper 2.5 m. seam thick with a workable reserve of 5,30,000 tonnes.

6. Lakadong—which yields a thin inconsistent coal seam from 0.3 to 3.0 m thick.

7. Tenglah—coal from here is of inferior type, highly crushed and sheared nature. Tura sandstones in fact stretch from west Darranggiri across the Rongdi river into Nongstoin state. The deposit is confined to East Darranggiri with seam varying from 1.8 m thick lower to 1.0 m thick upper but one seam is up to 2.5 m thick. The reserve is expected to yield 32,000,000 tonnes of good quality coal within 25 sq kms of



the field. The next deposit is Langrin or Umblei east of Moheskola stream with 4 seams of about 18.0 m thick covering an area of 80 sq kms of the field. The total reserve is expected to contain 80,000,000 tonnes for 5/8ths of the field.

*Copper, lead and zinc*—polymetallic sulphide mineralisation is traceable at Umpyrtha, with an appropriate ingredient, copper has been discovered in the bed of the Um Sohryngkew below Mawsmmai but thin blue green film of copper salt has been noticed in a rock face exposed in the belt of the Rilang river at Langba near Langrin.

*Corundum*—Corundum is found in locally segregated bodies in the sillimanite-bearing rocks in Sonapahar which previously was worked by the Khasi Mines Company.

*Dumortierite*—two bands of quartz-dumortierite-tourmaline schist, located near Mawshynrut has one of the bands extending upto 60 m in thickness and scattered over 0.8 km.

*Gem Stone*—sapphirine has been recorded at Pathar Knang.

*Glass sands*—with quartz grain, pure or admixed with mica or other minerals, used in the manufacture of both glass or sheet glass is reported near Laitryngew with about roughly 406,400 tonnes estimated reserve.

*Iron ore*—Small patches of black sand composed of limonite and magnitite such as found in the stream bed north of the village of Laitmawsiang, pebbles and boulders of magnitite such as these scattered on the top of a hillock east of Rambrai are not much of economic importance. Outcrops of similar rocks are noticed at Nongkyndong, Nongmawsmmai and near Nongianglong and in the vicinity of Rongjeng. A vein of magnatite-grunerite-granulite was noted in the southwest of Ara which extends for about 50 km between Ara and Um Synthai river. Similar type is traced near Rangsapara.

*Limestone*—the limestone belt running from Lamgoan (Langrin area) via Therriah ghat, Shella and Mawsynram with concentration more intensive between Therriah ghat and Shella river is exposed and this, with the zone located between Bhola-ganj and Shella has a long term reserve about 900,000,000 tonnes. In the vicinity of Cherra, it has an estimated reserve of

40,000,000 tonnes and dolomite 20,000,000 tonnes. Langkyrdem, Pynursla and Nongtalang also contain patches of limestone. More concentration of the highly developed bed covering a 200 sq kms area is located between the Prang and the Lubha rivers and between the Hari and Prang rivers in the Lakadong plateau. It is high grade limestone. Besides limestone exists near Syndai, Sutnga and Nongkhlieh. That at Nongkhlieh is about 100 m thick.

*Oil*—oil seepages are located near Umpyrdit in Narpuh forest area, Telcherra, Khasimara, Dholai, Dhamalia and Some-swari river.

*Phosphates*—phosphatic nodules spherical to ellipsoidal, brownish-yellow externally but dark-grey internally are found in the Garampani area.

*Pyrites*—admixed with coal with little proportion of sulphur as revealed by a few bands of sandstone and shales near Mawsynram is not exactly the same like that of amphibolite intruding the biotite gneisses on the west bank of Synthei river near Lajadubi.

*Sillimanite*—for which Nongstoin has sillimanite-corundum ore beds in Sonapahar obtained from massive deposits in large boulders and also in lenticular bodies in the gneissic and schistose rocks. Over 26 sillimanite-corundum ore bodies are located in a 500 sq kms area. The deposits are localised around Sonapahar, Nangpur, Nangbain and Lallmati hill near Lum Ryngekew. It is admitted that Sonapahar belt contains an approximate reserve of 2,55,000 tonnes of high grade sillimanite-corundum ores. Besides, a few million tons of low grade tonnes quartz sillimanite schist exists.

During the British advent, one coal mine in Cherrapunji was leased by a Khasi Syiem to the Government which entrusted excavation to one Company for excavating coal according under the terms and conditions of reference in the lease. The work was continued until 1961 or so when the entire reserve, under the lease, was replenished. In Shyrmang (Jowai's suburb), Laitryngew, Pynursla the local fields have been worked by the local people for which coal trade is conducted daily with the Assam plains. In the District, the bulk supply is concentrated at Shillong, Jowai and Cherrapunji mainly for domestic purposes. Trade must have been in considerable quantity as hundreds of trucks carry

coal daily to Gauhati for supply to steamers, railway and industries. Very soon the other regions located westward and centrally in the state will be in a position to consume coal in large returns and, therefore, the possibility has to be explored for working out more coal mines. Mawdon and Lakadon coal mines were worked locally previously, but because of transport difficulties, the work was relinquished.

The Khasis, besides working in coal, also excavate limes limestone quarries, particularly those located at Mawlong, Nongstoin, Langrin and Cherra have been worked for a long time. The Prang limestone deposit in Shella and Bholaganj has been excavated and lime thus produced is sent to the cement factory in Chatak (Bangladesh). Now the cement factory at Cherrapunji is consuming lime locally produced<sup>1</sup>.

Iron-smelting has now become extinct but in the past, it was the biggest Khasi industry, iron being extracted from the sand-bearing ores floated over the artificial channels of water and the ores drained at reservoirs. They extracted pure steel from the melted iron and turned it into multifarious agricultural and carpenter' tool and implement and these, with pig-iron, were sold, lakhs of maunds, annually to the plains. Iron-smelting centres were Myllem, Nongspung, Rngi Mawsaw, Mawphu, Nongstoin, Kynshi Rambrai, Myriaw, Rangjyrteh and Sohrarim and Tuber. Jaintiapur, Rangjyrteh, Bholaganj, Bardwar and Sonapur were exits through which these were transacted into the plains. Near Nartiang, even today the magnetite iron sand washed of decomposed granite is also used for extracting iron<sup>2</sup>.

1. Some limestone quarries were given on lease and contractors engaged, cater to need for supply in the factory.

2. Much of the data on geology has been kindly supplied by the Geological Survey of India, Shillong.

### 1. Garo

*A. chik* is the general title used for the various groups of people after the division of the race. The title is used to denote different groups such as the Ambeng, Atong, Akawe (or Awe), Matchi, Chibok, Chisak Megam or Lyngngam, Ruga, Gara-Ganching who inhabit the greater portion of the present Garo Hills District. But the name applies also to the groups of Garos scattered at the neighbouring places in Assam, Tripura, Nagaland and Mymensing. A *chik* seems to be synonym of *Mande* which means Man in which at all instances, the nomenclature suggests not only the homogeneous character of the race of the natural and spontaneous growth, but also the concepts of true racial solidarity maintained by all groups and through the ages. Garo tales refer to the various forms of Garo confederation in the past in which their powerful kings wielded the *A. chiks* in the present District, Bengal and Assam into one great entity. Moreover the term *Nok* used as prefix for *Nokma* (chieftain) and *Nokpante* (village institution) seems to be interrelated to *Mande* which signifies a sort of tribal organisation which thereby stands for the race. The main groups of the Garos are—

1. *Ambeng*—who inhabit the western area which includes Tura, the District headquarters,
2. *Atong*—confined in the Lower Simsang (Someswari) valley,
3. *Akawe*—who reside on the north-eastern area of the District and extend into Goalpara and Kamrup districts,

4. *Matchi*—who settle on the central highlands, on the upper reaches of Simsang river,
5. *Chibok*—on the Upper Bhugi valley,
6. *Ruga*—at the Lower Bhugi valley,
7. *Dual*—close to Matchi on the upper reaches of Simsang,
8. *Chisak*—north of the Matchi and Dual,
9. *Gara-Ganching*—who dwell on the mid-southeastern portion, west of Atong,
10. *Kotchu* —on the mid-eastern part,
11. *Koch*—on the south-west.<sup>1</sup>

Besides, there are Megams, an admixed Garo-khasi group on the mid-western part of the Khasi Hills and Digls.<sup>2</sup> I think Dikhi or Digl is equivalent of Diko called in Khasi. Dikhil or Diko lived in isolation<sup>3</sup> until the British advent; the Duals are found in Mymensing District. Each of the groups has a tradition and folklore of its own which recount the exploits and deeds of their brave forefathers. Attempts are made to examine the various aspects of Garo society and culture and some features in their customs and traditions.<sup>4</sup>

*Household organisation*—the society is matrilineal, mother kinship pattern to some extent resembling that of Khasi. Children adopt their respective mother clans. There are essential differences in that while the Khasis ascribe to the youngest daughter the bulk of family inheritance, the Garos, on the other hand, by ascription recognise an heiress to family property from any of the daughters at the household in which case, she is married to one of her father's nephews. Usually the girl loved most, obedient and well behaved succeeds to that title. She is

1. Some of the Koch customs are quite different from Garo.
2. These groups are sometimes treated as Garo and sometimes Non-Garo.
3. Large batches of Garos who resided at Mymensing District have moved into Garo Hills District in consequence of the conflict that took place since 1964.
4. Remnants of Burmese called *Man* confined in this region since the end of the Anglo-Burmese war, are found in Phulguri and their settlement extends to Selsela. They are Buddhists and have a monastery.

called *Nokna* and her husband is *Nokrom* (cross-cousin marriage among the Khasis, on the other hand, does not exist). The father of the girl generally succeeds to get her married to one of his nephews, this kind of cross-cousin marriage being known as *A-kim* by which this avunculocal relationship is given continuity. If no nearest nephew, son of the father's own sister is found, a distant man in the father's clan is taken. There are cases also in which an heiress is married to a man outside her father's clan. Burling says, 'if a boy is taken as an heir, he will move into the household of his wife's parents. He will be expected to make free use of all the possessions of the family, to participate in the work in the family's fields and to share in the responsibility and in the rewards of the family labour'.<sup>1</sup> In respect of *Nokrom* and *Nokna*, the system is matrilocal whereas in the case of other daughters in the house who are not eligible to heirship, it is neolocal since they are to set up independent households shortly after their marriage. The *Nokrom* shoulders more responsibilities since she looks after the affairs of the whole household whereas his sisters-in-law have less responsibility. Yet females are more titular as the real management for household and estate devolves upon the father and consequently his son-in-law. The cross-cousin marriage is the most accepted marital form and compares well with the system that obtains from the Singpho, the Wancho, the Nocte and the Tangsa Nagas in the Tirap District of Arunachal where men marry from their mother's lineage. The bulk of the family property, ancestral or parental house, cattle, tools, utensils, furniture, clothing and ornaments, buildings, other forms of movable and immovable property is bequeathed upon the heiress and into which the self-acquired property of her husband is merged. Other sisters receive fragments but are entitled to use plots of land for cultivation and other purposes. The son-in-law steps up to the position of the father in the house after his death or becoming invalid. 'The material goods owned by a couple are essentially family property, though some of them are of course used more by the husband and some more by the wife'.<sup>2</sup> The *chrra*, maternal uncles exert influence over the conduct of their nieces and nephews while assuming the position of fathers in their children's place. So they have intimate relations with their

1. Burling, *Rongsenggri*, p. 89. The conditions apply to the structure in the village of *Rongsenggri* and other neighbouring places.

2 *Rongsenggri*, p. 131.

respective wives' relations consisting of mothers aunts and uncles. Inheritance is confined to the same clan and not outside.

Some variance is noted. There has been a tendency at certain places to make the youngest daughter the custodian of the property. Should the Nokna be disqualified through misbehaviour, another daughter is chosen to take her place. Should she be childless, one of her sisters or a daughter of the latter is selected to succeed her. In any case the latter has to be acquainted with the discharge of responsibilities both temporal and spiritual under the guidance of selected persons from the mahari. If she has misbehaved leading to a divorce with her husband, she forfeits her right while he is free to marry another lady from her *mahari* (family) or *machong* (clan). If a man divorced her, he has no claim over the property which subsequently will pass on to her next husband. The male person, however, is compensated to take a concubine if the first wife is barren or physically unfit. In case his wife expires, he may marry into the same house, provided a living survivor is a widow or spinster in case of an unmarried girl. The lady, in the event of being childless, is entitled to marry into her husband's lineage which probably means that she has been separated from him. Polygamy existed in the past, restricted to rich men who required many helping hands to cope with some business undertakings in which case the concubines from the same house were preferred but the wealth reverted to females of their clan rather than his. The kinship terms are *Machong* (a clan), *Chatchi* (a group of clan) and *Mahari* (family) which are like synonyms of *Kur*, *Kpoh* and *ka iing* in Khasi. They have exogamous clans such as Momin, Marak, Sangma, Shira and other smaller clans.<sup>1</sup> They are prohibited to marry within the same clan or a group of the clan.

1. Totemetic belief centres round the origin of Sangma from a stag which is similar to a story of the *Sylam* (Rajah's family) of Nongstoin in the adjoining Khasi Hills who trace their origin from a stag. It seems the belief was established under the Garo influence. A story told indicates the A. Chik belongs to a solar race and that Ma-ak and Sangma had their original home in Tibet while Momin had its origin in a Muslim tribe resulting from Muslim-Garo inter-marriage after Mir Jumla's invasion through Goalpara district in 1661. Garo is ascribed as younger brother of Japan whose home was on Mediterranean shores. The tribes such as Singpho (Jingpaw) and Garo believe they belong to the solar race associated with sacrifices to the heavenly bodies. Their rites had been brought by their fore-fathers during their migration to their present home.

The father-in-law imparts incentives to his son-in-law. The latter works on a separate field in the same family plots. The other unmarried sons cultivate at their respective plots of land while they eat from the same hearth and live with their parents. The produce from their fields is integrated into the family barns from which they take some sale-proceeds to meet their personal expenditure.

Vast estates of family lands are known as *A. king* over which, the *A. king* Nokma supervises but proprietary rights may have been held by a Nokma his wife who has no right to exclude members of her mahari from cultivating and making other uses in the plots of land. Spokesmen of the Mahari meet to decide issues relating to the sale of lands or renting out a plot of *A. king*, the sale-proceeds being divided, leaving the largest share to the custodian. They have different ways of settling disputes. The Mela-Salbonga is a traditional panchayat system which deals with inter-village disputes, the accused being punished with payment of fines. But a simpler way of settling disputes is by referring such cases to spokesmen of groups concerned who explore ways and means for reaching a mutually agreed decision. Some plots of the *A. king* are parted to other groups of maharis in which donors hold proprietary rights and titles.

*Marriage*—marriage ceremonies are diverse from place to place. In Garo customs it is the girls who propose a match to boys; now-a-days the approach may have been made through love letters. The case is different with the Khasis and Jaintias in whose society boys take the initiative and offer themselves. Approach directly or indirectly for instance as giving of letters, has been a new tendency that has grown in the town's circles. The match may have developed independently of their parent's arrangement, in which they make acquaintance and later on report to their respective parents and if both sides are willing, the marriage is arranged. If the situation has got out of control, the two settle as husband and wife as a case of concubinage without any formal marriage being made. Representatives of the two maharis meet and confirm the matter. This system is not very much favoured in the society both among Garos and Khasis. The Khasi Presbyterian church suspends the couple who prefer to settle down in this way for a time scheduled after which they are again admitted as members of that church. Among



Christians, nuptials are solemnised in the church and rarely at the house of the bride. Some Garo marriage customs are interesting.

The marriage by seizure is their original custom which appears to have no parallel with other peoples.<sup>1</sup> It is not, however, prevalent now as it was three decades back. In this they make a surprise seizure of a would-be-groom. Suppose if any girl or her parents have fascination of any young man, a few nearest clans-men are engaged to get that person caught and brought to their home. Such a capture of a would-be-groom is a common feature. The seizors take time to study his movements and arrange a convenient capture of him which might have taken place on the road or market or field or grove whichever if that gives them an opportune occasion after a careful contrivance among themselves as to the simplest and easiest means. It comes upon a victim like a surprise, he being caught and led into the house of his would-be-fiance where he is confined. The girl develops acquaintance and woos him. The guards keep proper watch of him. The man may manage to escape for which a second seizure will be made and he is brought again. Even if he escapes for the second time, he will be caught for the third time; for which if he absconds, he is set free. On the night during the third surprise catch, the couple are left alone. The groom still has freedom to leave her provided he returns a sort of compensation to the eiders in her household even after he is forcibly married to her. In other cases he is just to announce that he is unwilling to be her life-long partner and set free.

A formal marriage other than capture also exists. Such marriage comes out of the consent among the groom's and bride's parents as a pre-marital condition. It is a simple ceremony conditioned by the bath which the bride takes at the village well; the next salient feature is the taking of the bride in a procession to the groom's place. No ceremony is held at the latter's place but the intention is to bring him to his in-laws' place in which his marriage ceremony will be conducted. The

1. This custom obtains from the Khasis but is limited only to the royal families in which nieces or sisters of the Syiem (Rajah) are obtained husbands (called *Kongors*) through seizure. The husband, when captured was mounted over a horse and brought to a princess. The system although restricted is similar to the Garo in other respects.

bride in the procession is attended by her close kith and kin from her mother's mahari. At the groom's place, the groom is called out and persuaded to join them as the time has been due and not to tarry. The groom may try to obstruct going with them but the clansmen of the bride force him out. His parents insist on the company not to take him but being unable to resist, they let him go sometimes amidst sobs since they are to lose him. The couple are brought to the bride's house. The sacrifice of a hen and a cock is performed in the ceremony which is described in the next paragraph. The people partake at the feast. But sometime it is necessary that the groom is guarded lest he absconds and comes back not again.

The marriage ceremony is simple. A priest performs the ceremony. No elaborate marriage contracts are interchanged as among Khasis between the representatives of the bride and the groom. There is no exchange of betel-nuts among the two sides, no pouring of beers from two vessels (of the bride and groom) into a third vessel as Khasis do. Among the Garos, the priest thrusts a cock at the backside of the boy and a hen at the backside of the girl, decapitates the necks of the fowls in the name of the couple, looks into the entrails and reads the omens. The groom is then given a meal with a chicken curry prepared by the bride after the ceremony. After sunset, the groom is taken round the village in company of his attendants. He may have visited the Nokpante (village hall) and a few houses. All present partake in a feast at the bride's house. The ceremony, however, differs according to the nature of the marriage—love, pre-arranged and capture. In another case, the marriage is performed at the bride's uncle's place. This is different, the girl having stayed with her fiancé at her maternal uncle's place for sometime past. It is something of girl's briefing. After acquaintance has become mature, the couple leave for the bride's parents' place where they are to settle down. Just before their departure, a ceremony is performed when a priest strikes the girl with a chicken at her backside first and then at the boy's and beheads it. He takes out another live chicken but now he beats it upon the boy first and the girl finally. This chicken is also cut. The party partake at a sumptuous feast. The couple do not take the curry from the beheaded fowls. They relish a soup prepared from another fowl. The betrothal which had occurred sometime back was also performed with a ceremony which centres on the bringing

of a girl to her maternal uncle's place. She is accompanied by her father. They had brought with them bundles of meat placed inside the baskets or wrapped in leaves. A feast was served at which the groom also joined. The father of the girl took leave of them in which the girl stayed with the groom until the couple decided to shift to the bride's place.

The couple in course of time have become properly acquainted and settled. The marriage having been confirmed, the couple after a few days go on a brief visit to the husband's mother and give her some presents. The husband this time brings some of his personal belongings and some gifts from his parents or those things which have been a result of his self-acquired property before marriage. Only a little bit of the ancestral property in movable goods may have been parted of to him just as in the case of Khasis.

*Mortuary*—Garos burn their dead. Normally the corpse is retained for two or three days just to have time for relatives from different places assemble and pay their last respect. They have elaborate rituals of sacrifice and care of the corpse. Batch after batch of relatives pour in, whose coming and arrival is indicated by the beat of gongs which they carry. The nearest relations contribute various offerings to the household of the demise. The village folk may arrange fire-wood for the cremation. Rich persons keep several gongs near the corpse and wash it with large quantity of special liquors. The corpse is laid at an open mehang in the rear of the house and cremated at the compound of the house in which the bier is placed at the elevated pyre.

Cremation usually occurs at the evening hours but some time the period is extended to midnight. The pyre is supported by uplong poles. Rich persons keep engraven figures and other decorations over the poles. The corpse is burnt until it is finally consumed. The charred bones are collected inside an earthen ware and buried inside the ground over which a small wooden shed is constructed which marks that ossuary. At other places, the bones, immediately after collection, are thrown in the river and not interned. The rites are too diverse: for some time, the charred bones are not immediately buried but when collected, are wrapped in a piece of cloth and kept in the house. Meanwhile a pit is dug where the bones are finally buried in a separate ceremony. A small shed raised over the

ossuary in fact has receptacles over the edges of the wooden or bamboo pillars in which some grains of paddy are placed. Moreover an effigy of the deceased is planted from the ground in the form of a carved post, the clothes and some belongings of the deceased used in his lifetime being suspended from the effigy. The effigy stands erect near the cremation site. A tradition points out that sometimes the bones of the deceased are taken to his mother's place, his mother being the incumbent to perform the internment of his remains which is similar to the practice of the Khasis. The shed which covers up the ossuary is destroyed after six months from the demise of the person. It is post-funeral and final purgatory rite in which a cow or any other animal is sacrificed and dance and feasts are held. After cremation, the household offer food to the deceased for a number of days on the ossuary where the bones are laid. Funerary feasts are held to friends and relatives assembled before the corpse is disposed of and drinks are served to all present.

Traditions say, Garo chiefs and kings, in the past, were given pompous cremation but it was the custom that such dignitary was burnt with one of the skulls being considered to be a hard-won trophy the deceased had obtained during lifetime. Garos in the past not only brought human skulls for decoration of the village hall and houses but with such skulls they made the rite complete. An influential man was cremated with large number of sacrifices for which at the time of cremation, two bulls were sacrificed, one near the pyre and the other at some distance simultaneously whereas drummers clapped their gongs vigorously at the time such sacrifice was performed. Sometimes a funeral procession following the cortege went out into the village in which drummers beat their gongs during the procession before the corpse is finally disposed of at the cremation.

The household survivors, after an interval, perform certain allegiances to the close relatives of the deceased. The mother of the male deceased in such situations, receives from his wife and children a gong in good condition. Were he a Nokrom, his mother would have received more. Even if the demise was a woman, to her family were sent some presents by her grandchildren.

*The world here-after*—the people believe in the existence of the world here-after. It is located on the summits of some

famous peaks. One of them is Balpakram. The other is Chitmang but it is only a temporary haltage before the spirits are again embarked on a longer journey yet into a permanent abode. They are guided by other guardian spirits in their journey against fiends and evil spirits which obstruct. Shortly after the demise, the spirit of the deceased still needs sustaining and spiritual support from the living counter-parts for which it is constantly offered with food and beers. Accidental deaths, particularly, are not good signs and those dying of homicide and accidents will still meet more hindrances than those dying of normal deaths. Those died of epidemics, like Khasis, are buried, not burnt. The Garos seek to appease the Ogre by wearing heavy earrings; he helps the spirits of their dead in their onward march.

The Garos believe in the theory of re-birth of the soul. They do not of course explain how it performs its cycle. They believe in the transmigration of the soul as a state of reward and punishment. Those who live a virtuous life will attain bliss or are reborn into higher stages, being destined for more accomplishments in the next human existence. Those who have not conformed to moral standards are to become beasts or ghosts.

*Religion*—their philosophy of religion is a clear-cut perception of both theistic and animistic beliefs. They believe in *Rabuga Tatara* or *Ranaka Taka*, a name of their Supreme Being held in great awe and reverence as the author of creation, dispenser of time, architect of the universe, the maker, the modeller, the source of life and strength and the disposer of human destiny. But he is more removed from the people's state of affairs as his place is taken by other deities. *Talkame Kalga*, another god, is omnipresent who guides the individuals and empowers minor spirits to torture human beings for their acts of omission and commitment and for having failed to perform all the religious rituals. The Garos describe him to be of male and sometimes of female attribute. *Nuting* or *Muring* or *Nuring* is a supreme goddess and the executive instrument of the supreme god; *Dingipa Ba-pra* is another name of the goddess who transforms the universe from one stage to another,<sup>1</sup> through her creative functions (*Norebik* and *Noredim*), she is the source of light (*kalgra*), the fountain of all wisdom. She

1. *Folk Tales of The Garos*, p. 369.

moulds the firmament into its form and gives to the heavenly bodies their radiance, beauty and light. She controls the myriad phenomenon of nature through her different agencies. Saljong is identified with the sun; he exercises control over the animate beings. He is assisted by his wife, Minim. The interpretation of his functions differs from place to place; yet many Garos speak of him as the lord over the crops. The mother of the human race, sister of Mining Muja was married to a son of Dongjongma and when the nuptials was over, the tradition has it that Saljong and his wife retreated to heaven. The Bhutias and Garos claim descent from this parentage. *Goera* is a god of thunder and lightning which the serpents fear most. *Susime* is a moon god. The heavenly bodies as the source of light, heat, rain and cloud are propitiated with fowls sacrifice. Garos claim a divine origin to their race and consider themselves the descendants of gods. *Mogma* god, son of Asni Dingsni, was their progenitor.

Garos is very close to Khasi theistic conception. Their supreme god has similar titles such as *U Blei najrong nathian* (the Infinite), *U Trai Kynrad* (omnipotent), *U Nongbuh Nongthaw* (author of creation), *U Nongbuh bynta* (assigner of fate) and *U Blei Shi hajar nguh* (overlord). Similarly there is a goddess, *Ka Blei synshar Nonghukum*, a guide to destiny. Sacrifices are held in major cases to her and indirectly to the supreme god.

Nature, vegetation, water come under the spheres of different spirits. *Nastu* originated all waters and transformed part of this physical world into vegetation and wild life. *Raga Gauda Abek* is a god of fountains. *Durokma* is a queen over tigers and tigresses. *Horaman* is an earth deity. *Rengram* is described to malevolent spirit. *Chual Chiggal* is a bad spirit which destroys the crops. Fairies and denizens cause insanity. Some spirits wear the form of tigers and beasts. There are fiends which take off travellers on the road. There are spirits which seek fun by obstructing prayers and sacrifices to Saljong.

Many of the peaks are the abodes of their deities. In their pantheon exists diverse spirits such as gods of wind and storms, gods of rain, serpent spirits in great rivers, rock and cave spirits, water nymphs and fairies, fiends and ghosts and other images of nature. Sacred places and groves haunted by the spirits are marked.

Some spirits are recounted to be the originators of cultivation and wood-crafts, musical arts and dance, medical and medicinal formulae and war and peace. Such techniques and arts were learned by their forefathers from their gods. Head-hunting renowned in the past was a religious institution connected with fertility rites. Other deities of hunting, fertility, wealth and wisdom receive appropriate offerings.

The philosophic conception is rich about the beginning of the race. They recount stories how the heaven was separated and how the earth took shape. They have the story how their deities came incarnate and founded their race. Various sacrifices are offered to undo the action of bad spirits. They have different sacrifices. But bulls are a potential form of sacrifice in which oblong posts are raised. Normally the bull is cut with a single stroke of the blade. 'The blood is collected in a pan and placed with the head and a lighted lamp under a sort of canopy near the altar. All present bow themselves to the ground. A white cloth is then drawn over the arch and all is left undisturbed for an hour that the demon may come and take to what he desires. When the veil is lifted, cooking begins for the feast'.

Normally the office of priest is not hereditary. Priesthood is characterised not only by citation of prayers, proverbs and invocations but also by the actual knowledge of sacrifices and rites, divination methods, worship at the altar, curing of patients and other allied religious necessities. It is a skill acquired or inherited by the present generation from the veterans in these lines.

They have many religious incantations. Priests adept in performance of the religious instructions perform divination. The most popular device is breaking of eggs in which the auguries are read from the falling and location of shells. In examining the entrails of animals, they consult the omen from the cohesion in the intestines in which a cohesion is a good sign and the gap is a bad sign. In marriages, sickness and fertility rites, they kill the chicken, cow or pig and look into the omens. In these acts the forecast is normally appropriate since honesty, diligent search and fear of God are involved. Purgatory rite is performed to clear the household or person of any contagion, violation of taboo or any immoral action. Counter-enquiries conducted to get a clear answer involve a larger investment in eggs and animals

and entail a good deal of expenditure. All these beliefs are similar to Khasi.

They have certain sacrificial rites for appeasing or invoking their spirits. The spirits are appeased during the time of sickness of any member in the household by sacrificing fowls and other animals. By divination they find out the cause of any mishap befalling them. The spirit who is the cause of trouble is appeased. The sacrifice centres round the altar, a mound of earth with four sticks or pillars in which various offerings are laid and in which several dosages of festival beer are poured. The priest or sacrificer raises invocations and cuts down a fowl on the neck, besmears the sticks or pillars with its blood and throws some entrails upon the altar. It is followed by the sacrifice of a goat in which if its neck is severed in one stroke, it indicates to be a good sign. All join in feast and drinks are served. Warding off of spirits is performed through dance by men. There is an animal sacrificial rite called *Watchitala* to invoke the sending of down-pours. To prevent the contagion of diseases, a monkey caught alive is also sacrificed at a ceremony called *Balima*.

*Festivals*—the Garos observe some fertility rites. Felling and burning of jhums, weeding of plants and reaping of crops are inaugurated by the performances of such sacrificial rites. The rites seek to invoke the spirits to save their grains from being devoured by wild animals, to procure sufficient rain and bless them with good harvest. The rites are enlivening with colourful dances, musical relays and jovial sports. The village Nokma holds an important portfolio in deciding the dates of festivals, inaugurating the agricultural season and organising the vital programmes.

The calendar year starts with the performance of *Agalmaka*, which finalises the burning of jhums. It is winter time, conditions are good for burning in which flames rise up from all over the field and consume all combustible matter. The fire continues until the late night hours. The next day is the day of festival. Various families perform egg sacrifices at the sacrificial sites in their respective fields. The altar contains a single oblong bamboo planted where offerings of rice and curries are laid at the base of the bamboo. To make the rite complete, libations are also poured. Family feast follows in the evening at all households. Meals and beers are taken. The ceremony lasts for a few days and intervenes between burning and the first sowing of the



seed. During the *Denbilsia* which precedes this ceremony, a goat is sacrificed at the Nokma's house in an altar specially constructed. The night resounds with beats of gongs and a colourful dance is held. In one of the sowing seasons, the village folk sacrifice a cow at the community level and then various households undertake sacrifice of eggs or fowls at respective fields. When rice plant has sprouted, the Nokma sacrifices a pig at his field and invocations are offered on behalf of the village. It is weeding rite. There is no dance but music of the gongs, wind pipes and horns is vigorously played. The other festivals are the following:

*Rongchugala* in which the first plucking of paddy from the old field and millets at the new fields is performed associated with men's war dance against the background of gong beats played in different arts. The sacrifice is located near the field. It contains some offerings of food and sprinkling of liquors. Dances occur in respective houses.

*Ahaia* which inaugurates the plucking of paddy. It is autumn time and the plant has ripened. Several digging sticks are accumulated near the farm house at the field. Household members at the field take these sticks and make ceremonial representation of some phases of cultivation after which the grains are neatly plucked and bounded in sheaves. Food with meals and fish is offered to the spirits. The households partake in a light feast. At night households perform dancing and singing in their respective places. The households observe some taboos: no fruits are taken and sale of yam is prohibited. The chants *A-ho-ho*, *A-ho-ho* are raised towards the end of ceremony. It is not known whether it is a form of greeting or ritual.

The richest and most original festival is *Wangala* and the final of all fertility observances during the year. Every village looks gayish and wears a new festive look as the season of the festival has approached on. All persons now take out new dresses. Repairs of all houses are actively engaged; cane and bamboo are brought from the grove; other timber and creeper plants are heaped up. Men are seen at work in fastening the thatch in the roof, replacing parts of the cracked walls and fixing parts of the mechang, village roads, wells and water points, approach roads; lanes are also cleaned as if to welcome State guests in their midst. The final funeral ceremony of the deceased in the year past is performed simultaneously in which

the sheds covering the ossuary are done away with once and for all. The living household is no longer disturbed by the memory of the deceased. In some of such ceremonies, cows are slain and dances are conducted.

*Wangala* lasts for many days. Some variance may be found from one village to another as regards the details in the performance. Lots of animals are kept in family stock, best grains are stored and beer is brewed in large vessels. Women do most of this work. The central sacrificial rite is an offering of food wrapped in a plantain leaf. The festive dance is all the more colourful and performed in varied arts. Beats of gongs resound from all corners in their pitch governed with well disciplined accents and timings. Each household has much to partake in feast and much music to make. While music falls on the ear, the colourful and pompous dance rolls before the eye in the elegant dance of maidens in their fashions with gentle bends and turns, while male drummers and pipers attend them beating up their gongs bending low and hopping up to keep the art and make the mood of maidens more expressive and conveying it with some meaning. It seems the dance which girls display conforms in moods and gestures to digging the earth or falling the bough of tree or plucking of fruits. It is not meditative. On this occasion, boys and girls court friendship and acquaintance. In each of the houses there is the burning of incense from a scented wood or leaf. People decorate their houses with rice gums. The folk dance is first held at the Nokma's place when it is inaugurated and then batches of elegant and jovial dancers go out into the village and visit all the houses. The Nokma's residence is illumined with rich decorations and lights. With this festival performed, culture glows at its best and is reminiscent of the rich heritage, philosophy and folk traditions of the people. There is something to learn from the imaginative and creative minds of the ancient Garos who originated these arts.

*Dress and Ornaments*—the people in the past were barely dressed. Moreover during the summer season, heavy clothing was not necessary. Diversifications in dress pattern from place to place are also due to the different climatic conditions. Those who live in Bangladesh and Assam prefer light and thin textures while people on the hills, need clothings with coarse and heavy texture. A few Garo men in the plains have been noticed

wearing dhotis and shirts like their Assamese neighbours, probably so those in Bangladesh as in the plains such dress is more suitable. Garos have cotton ginning as cotton is the principal cash crop of the District. To-day weaving of yarn has occupied women in urban areas who turn out sashes, shawls, bags and provide themselves for their needs from their own weaving. And yet it is practised on a limited scale.

Women use a body cloth; it is black. Sometimes it is red of colour against white or blue stripes. This pattern is also used by men as shirting. Besides, women use an indigenous skirt known as *Dakmanda* (in Ambeng). Men, besides the body cloth, use an apron covering the waist and passed in and between the thighs, the front-side in it being a patch of ornamented brass seals, stones and cowries. They wear a turban on the head but women use head-bands only in dance leaving a patch of head-bands hair bare, but men on all occasions manage to keep their heads fully covered. Women are embellished with heavy ornaments in which necklaces and earrings are more conspicuous. Women wear such heavy sets of brass earrings which keep the ear-lobes distend and are weighed heavily. They use heavy necklaces both of coral beads and metals. Sometimes they supplement their neck ornaments with balls from a kind of fern, which when cut into small fragments, each of them is modelled as a ball. They are boiled and soaked completely, and next are extracted and held by a band. White shells are also preferred for necklaces. Rich persons use metals. Other patterns have been adopted as innovations coming down from the present change. Nokmas and dignitaries use a wrapper. Their clothings appear to be of silk. Now modern dress patterns as discernible from the traditional are followed in respect of the advanced families. Males now-a-days conveniently use shirts and pants as items of modern dress in advanced places. Women have adopted improved patterns of shawls, blouses and other accessories for their full dress. At dances, men wear special costume, make themselves resplendent with ornaments and over their turbans, affix a feather of birds or cocks. Over the lower fringe of the turban, they affix a few beads. Clothes as modern innovation have embroidery, vertical and geometrical patterns. In the past, men carried large haversacks and bags. They were held by neatly woven threads and have decorations of cane slips.

Dress becomes more grotesque during the Wangala festival. It is winter time in which people can easily wear their tribal costume and rich robes. The sight is like a sea of turbans decked over with by long feathers in which dancers dance to their hearts' content in many transitions of arts against the interludes of gong beats and pipings. In the past, decorated pieces of hide along with motifs supplemented war men's dress. Body sashes were also worn.

*House models*—houses are mechang models in which the mechang occupies the rear portion of the house and attains a considerable height off the ground. Houses are laid against the background of cliffs. The house is elongated and has four compartments generally. Posts, pillars, cross-beams and fences of bamboo are used. Rich men of course use sal and other kinds of fine timber. Ancient palaces took another form; community halls exhibit their own pattern. To many houses are attached some barns and wood-sheds. Many of their field houses are aid over trunks and branches of trees as those we come across in the northern Khasi Hills and the Jaintia Hills. The latter are guard houses against wild animals. Compartmentation also differs from place to place. We shall dwell on the main features of the houses obtained from the district.

The house entered, we meet a porch along the level of the ground or slightly elevated from the ground which provides a shed in which paddy husking, ginning of cotton and other wicker works are done. Behind it there is a family hall which serves multifarious purposes and contains the necessary household equipments such as a fire-place, racks, shelves, baskets, containers and other things. The fire-place is an earthen hearth. Next comes the sleeping apartment of the household parents. On the rear most, a latrine is provided for the family. An open portico lays along the side of the house fenced with bamboo railings. Here guests sometimes are housed and visitors entertained although generally Garos welcome their friends to the main hall in the house. This pattern is very similar to the house model obtained from the major tribes of Arunachal. The roof is thatched in which the gable end receives intensive cover from where the grass is stretched upon the entire roof but the eaves are not lowered down to the sides as in the Khasi pattern. Fence is by bamboo slips plaited like mat.

Some families have pens for chickens outside the house. Some shut them in a porch in which at night they are laid on

leaf cushions. Some keep pigsties, others just keep them below the mechang. Cow sheds have appeared at some places.

The central hall is congested with important articles of furniture, food-stuffs, utensils, earthen wares, etc. Meat and fish laid over the racks suspended from over the fire-place are dried through the effect of smoke from the hearth. There are bamboo vessels used as containers. In the past stone dishes were used. In the gourds are stored the beers.

Horns, tusks, hide are kept as exhibits of trophy. Gongs are the valuable art-treasure. Wooden and bamboo motifs skilfully carved over the house posts or walls are decorative. Swords of rich men were plaited of gold in the past.

The important items of wealth are the gongs. Their possessions comprise houses and buildings, digging and agricultural tools, weapons and ornaments, furniture and other household goods. Some A. king lands comprise valuable groves, stones and boulders, lime-stones and coal quarries, orange and lemon plantations. Wet rice terraced fields in the river valleys and foothills are precious. Minerals have not been worked locally in which they have yet to learn about mining. There are different levels of economic opportunities but the masses of the people do not seem to be better off.

The tradition says that Garo kings of the past lived in gorgeous palaces and storied buildings.<sup>1</sup> During the British advent, their palaces measured 260 feet long by 40 feet broad and commanded a considerable diameter. Sal posts and pillars were nicely decorated with grotesque figures. There were other halls used by servants, slaves and guards. The courtyard in front was used for games, dances and conferences.

The *Nokpante* (village dormitory) where grown-ups and bachelors stay in to pass every night still survive at many places as a cultural centre. It plays an important part during the village festivals and meetings. Here village boys receive training in village administration, citizenship, community life under the guidance of veterans. They learn here their traditions and

1. Tree houses and nokpantes are storied platforms in appearance. We do not know whether Garos lived in caves although we have some stories of their adventure into the abodes of cave men and women.

acquire knowledge in the arts of dances, music and singing. In the past, such a village institution played its role not only in matters connected with citizenship or administration but warfare training being daily intensified at all the necessary levels. Besides it imparts training to boys in games and sports. Teams of traders and war men, according to exigency, were planned and conducted from it every year in the past. Head-hunters on return from their campaigns, celebrated their victories in it, before they were showered honours from other corners. Unmarried adults and boys although detached from it at day time, where they were confined to assist their parents in their home, at the grove and field, become integrated into it at night to further their sense of community life and shape the destiny of the village. Thus it has its impact as a school, club, cultural centre and training institute. To-day its importance has diminished at many places owing to the increase of schools.

Engravings and motifs over the front side and wooden pillars in this building survive as architectural and artistic relics. They have them in wood. They had no sculpture as Jaintias do. The Nokante reminds me of a Rengma Morung in Tseminyu which has on the wall of the porch a carving of a mithun's head. Such motifs are common in Garo Nokpantes. The gongs used at the festivals and Assemblies and markets are kept in it. The Nokpante has a stage and a fire-place. It has a dormitory where all boys sleep together. In the past a number of human heads were kept in each of the Nokpantes. They were the heads of the enemy or the slaves of the Garo kings obtained as a result of head-hunting and raid. The Nokmas kept at their homes some of such skulls. The British Government prohibited the keeping of skulls in the houses of the people and these warfare and religious symbols were exterminated. Gone were the days of brave acts and deeds of chivalry. The Nokpante is a mechang, one portion of the portico being open and roofed while the rest is properly housed fenced with the plaited bamboo mats. The pillar is of wood. There is a ground floor. The eaves of the thatch however do not loop down to the ground. The straw along the roof is neatly polished and made uniform.

*Food and Drinks*—rice is a main cereal crop. The supplementary cereals are maize, millet and tapioca. They are taken

after having been boiled over the fire. Pop corns and sugar-cane are delicacies to children. Arum plant and bamboo shoots are the daily items in the family menu of the villagers. They are prepared into curries. Sweet potatoes are also relished. There are varied and edible mushroom and tuberous roots. They like wild vegetables taken as salads. Now-a-days modern vegetables have been used largely.

Garos rear a large number of pigs. Very few have kine, goats and cows. Chickens are also kept by almost all households in the village. People need these animals not only for the purpose of food but sacrifices. Meat is their delicacy. They take cooked, dried and smoked meat and fish. Meats prepared as soups are common dishes. They preserve meat by drying it over the kitchen racks which lasts long. Sometimes meat is salted and packed up inside a bamboo chungu with other ingredients to keep it longer. Fish is caught from the stream. Those with crabs, frogs and tiny species are available from the hill streams. They are eaten after having been prepared as curry or after having been smoked or boiled. In some of the sacrifices, they offer fish to their spirits. At lower altitudes before the rivers debouch the hills for the plains, big fishes are obtained some as large as masheers while others are just the same as those obtained in the neighbouring plains. In the large catches, fish is preserved after it is sunned and obtained as dried. Dried fish is relished. Fish is also dried from over the fire. In more elaborate preparation, the bones are cast away and the fish is suspended from a stick. People from Simsang use to distribute dried fish all over the hills, but imports from the plains are not small. Dried fish prepared as curry is taken. It is used for making local chutneys mixed with onion, ginger, chillies. It is also smoked or boiled.

Meat is taken regularly. They get it from their domesticated and wild animals. Almost all animals available in the environment are taken and so are most of the birds. The animal is cut into slices. Sometimes they just roast the full size of the animal's body and distribute the meat from it. Crabs and frogs are considered as having food value as fish itself. Meat of elephants and snakes is a delicacy. However, these items may have been restricted as not all the Garos take them. They relish on occasions the rice boiled in a *Chunga*, bamboo tube, having been wrapped in a leaf. They take dried bamboo shoots cooked with meat and fish.

Some Garos are acquainted with chewing of areca-nuts with betelvines. The bark of the nut instead of the real nut is chewed when the fruit is out of season. It is chewed with a piece of betel-vine besmeared with lime.

In the preparation of beer, rice first is boiled when at the next stage, over it is sprinkled some yeast. The preparation is laid in a ware, the mouth being covered with a plantain leaf neatly rolled. This is similar to a preparation of *iad um* in Khasi. The ware is kept as it is for a few weeks until it is ready. Beer is also prepared from sticky millet and tapioca. The fermented rice by-product is used by people both as fodder for pigs and sacrificial offering. *Wanti* is a specially prepared beer fermented of rice and sprinkled with a special medicinal plant in which the grounded rice besmeared with that ingredient is laid inside a ware, the mouth of which is wrapped with a leaf. Some Garos plant their own tobacco leaves of which are used for smoking after they are powdered and rolled on which they smoke. Old men near the plains use *hookahs*.

Beer is considered as nutritive enough and is taken to repair physical strength. But drinking is bad in that it imbibes habits and addictions especially at festivals when beers are taken without any bar made.

A cake called *Menik* is prepared from the sticky rice specially planted. It is pounded, admixed with either salt or sugar and cinnamon and moistened in water. It is wrapped in a leaf and boiled in a ware having a lid with pores and obtained from the result of steaming. It is like Khasi *pu-syep*.

*Weapons* – in some dances, Garo men dance with their weapons. The weapons comprise a *melam*, a sword, double edged and blunt point, oblong, straightened with a light bend on a middle joint. Garo spears (Se. lu) are more elongated than Khasi<sup>1</sup> with wooden shafts and iron-heads. Great kings in the past used to engage a guard of spearmen. The spear was used in all modes of warfare, pitched battles as well as surprise raids and attacks. The shield generally is wooden or bamboo plaited, oval and not oblong or rectangular. The shields (*danil* or *sepi*) resemble Khasi type of wood, leather and steel. In emissary exchanges in the past, we have a story that Khasi quivers plaited

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1. Khasi spears measure about between 6 and 6½ feet.



of gold were given the Garo Kings in return for the swords decorated of gold or ornamented of black tufts of hair and were retained as tokens of friendship on both sides. Warfare having been now a story of the past, these weapons now stand as decorations and are used in festivals. During a journey outside the village, travellers use to carry spears to protect themselves against the wild animals and robbers.

*Head-hunting*—Garos as head-hunters were renowned in the past. Traditions are current of perpetration of raids into various places in modern Bangladesh and Goalpara, teams of raids pouring down into big estates of zamindars, the head-hunters ransacking and plundering whatever they could lay hands on and came home with a large booty and number of human skulls severed from their bodies, where at the village home, ceremonies were celebrated in public. It mattered little whether the skull was of a man, woman or child and whether it was actually chopped in consequence of a fair fight or surprise attack. The skulls were buried and later on disinterred and kept in a Nokpante or distributed among the actual head-hunters. Head-hunters became glorified. Definitely head-hunting was resorted to as a means to enhance the fertility of the soil and thereby increase the harvest. But it was more in the belief associated that it was of the supreme religious obligation and that all rites would be incomplete without its fulfilment. For Khasis on the other hand, head-hunting was not compulsory as a religious obligation but the enemy's head captured, enhanced the prestige of a community in which the skull of the fallen enemy was handed over the shield to the Syiem or chieftain, who mocked at it and cursed it. It was hung on the village gate and passers-by looked at it with contempt. The taking of captive head was the result of fair fight although in some tales, we find treason being resorted to which, in the opinion of many, was the sign of weakness and cowardice.

Garos used their weapons according to the emergency of the situation. The sword was used in duels, face to face, the spear was used as a thrust. Villages were built on the spur of the range so that the approach of the enemy from below the base would be pushed back by showering hails of stones and boulders. They entrenched themselves in their mountain fastness and kept the slope down with many pitfalls in which sharpened bamboo spikes were laid upward and hidden by bare

covering. They used a village gate for exit and entrance. They had various modes of warfare—hit hard and retreat, guerrilla, reconnaissance and conventional warfare. All these were combined with the effective military intelligence and espionage. Several stories told are of the Garo knights who killed an elephant, bear or leopard and tiger single-handed with a spear only when next, the hero came to a nearby village and announced of the incident to the villagers showing them his gory washed spear. A group of villagers followed him to the spot where the carcase was laid and it was split up for distribution leaving to the hero the most valued parts of the meat.

*Dance*—they have old war haunts, harvest, partners' choice and fertility dances. Besides, there is a general dance where both men and women dance. They depict different moods and gestures reflecting cultural emblems. The war dance (*Grika*) belongs to men, while women from the corners just cheer up. Males hold in their hands a sword (on the right) and a shield on the left representing combats but this is also a warding off the evil spirits who have brought upon them certain mishaps. The harvest dance is Wangala which we have discussed. In partners' or elopement dance (*jikseka*), girls and boys appear in appropriate gestures as if they were suitors' approaching and advancing while girls expressed either decline or acceptance. The boys turn rivals to one another. The dance is held as if it were against the background of the blossoming boughs of trees. They represent plucking of fruits (*chamdilroa*) in which a boy with a tail tied behind his waist and looping down is surrounded by 3 to 5 girls performing plucking as the boy skips or hops to turn round and round his tail. Fertility is indicated by the striking of digging sticks as if the group was performing tilling or digging or actual plucking of crops. In a group dance (*Chroka*), men in a line strike on with their feet one inverted in turn by the other and women moving in and out their hands around. In the past, head-hunters demonstrated their accomplishment by drums being howled out, incantations raised with uproarious noise and festive dance held. *Gariroa* is a merry-go-round, boys taking side on the left row and performing blowing of pipes and trumpets, beating gongs and drums in an orchestra while girls on the right row dance and hop forward and both go round and round the circle.

*Musical instruments*—gongs called *rang* when resounded mark certain auspicious occasions like meeting of councils,



**Mission Hospital**



**Dance**



**The Pupils**

played as choral music. Garo singers and balladists have several folk tunes which preserve their legends and history. Some are meditative and invocative. One folk tune, I have heard, is still sung by Garos in the Kamrup district which is reminiscent of the migration of their forefathers long ago from the north bank of the Brahmaputra river and their crossing of that river when thousands of people were flown on rafts of plantain trees into modern Amingaoan. The Garos then occupied the Kamakhya hillock which has been associated with their culture and history before they were scattered into various directions in Kamrup, Goalpara and the Garo Hills. They have oral poetry emerging from their hills and rivers, the beauty spots and the charming scenery. Their love songs are melodious and penetrating. Some of them survive as classical music handed down from the past.

*Sports and Games*—The pastime is properly utilised. Hiking, ankling and hunting are their favourite sports. In the village, a few persons only have guns and ammunitions, so hunting is mostly done by spearmen. They lay in wait in the jungle for a game, groups of them scattered into different directions and the game, when actually is seen approaching, is flown from one corner to another, the weapons sticking at it until it lays down breathless. Sometimes hunters take position from over the trees. Not only animals but birds and snakes are hunted. Modern shikari, however, has become prevalent around the townships.

They have devices for catching animals. Pitfalls are dug and hidden by a bare covering of surface soil supported by reeds, light bamboos and turfs. This is meant for minor animals. If the animals are larger, bamboo spikes are laid down with sharpened heads stretching upward. They keep a bait with a dog or any animal to attract the game to the trap. Garos in the past were interested in catching wild animals alive. Some of the birds, monkeys and squirrels are caught alive which are given as sacrifices to their deities. Stories are also told of snakes being caught alive by squeezing the neck to its last breath. There were experts who knew how to extract the poison during the catch. Elephants are obstructed from intruding the field in which bamboo spikes along the path known to have traversed by them are projected as fences. When elephants strike them, they are actually scratched with injury and dart away.

Wrestling was once their favourite game. The people like to arrange combats of cocks and animals. To add to the fun, the champion receives honours and with decorations while the fallen one or defeated is feasted by the group. They have javelin and other games.

Fish is also caught in several ways. They use at places certain nets woven of fibres of various kinds. They construct weirs across the stream and sometimes they just catch alive small fishes, crabs and frogs from the pebbles or mud with hands. They also fish by means of a hook in which is wrapped a bait. Probably fishermen in the south also use nets cast from their boats and rafts. In some places in Simsong valley, people have no scarcity of curries and meet their immediate needs by simply catching fishes from the river.

*Mythology*—we have mentioned some nature myths and historical episodes. Though positivists, some Garo tales are sentimental. In their folk-lore emerge different ballads, lyrics and wise sayings which recount many of the wonders in their past. Love stories are innumerable which speak of love's effect as inspiring, healing and harmonising. Love is an architect of human virtues, the moulder of the qualities of head and heart. The wonder is about its mysticism. Some tales are elegaic; others are jest and comedy but all leave some moral lessons. They attribute a philosophy to the myriad images of nature.

According to Dewan Singh Rongmothu,<sup>1</sup> 'the Garos possess extensive traditional accounts, mythology, fables and other forms of oral literature'. He observes the processes, tragedies and beauties of nature form the motifs of innumerable stories. Garo nature myths seek to explain different phenomenon and they bear a marked resemblance to the fables of Greece and Rome.

In the folk-tales are enshrined the activities, adventures and achievements of their forefathers. They preserve the life of the ancient heroes, their style of living, chivalry and their combat with the forces of nature. Garo knights had gigantic frame of body, robust mind and unconquerable spirit, they lifted

1. Preface to *The Folk Tales of The Garos*.

up a full-grown tusker, tore apart a living python, wrecked a tiger into the ground, husked paddy at a large rock and spat at the lion's roar. The story is, therefore, similar to that of the Khasi half giant men who lifted up gigantic stone slabs of tremendous weight, carried them for a day's distance and fixed them in the vault. With simple weapons and equipments, such as flint-stones, a leather bag, spear, bow and arrow, sword and animals' skin, these heroes wrought considerable achievements in the fields of battle, sports and game and adventures. In some of the other tales from Meghalaya, we find achievements and conquests wrought by means of tactful strategy and service of intelligence than of the human prowess

*Economic Life* – Garos are agricultural people mainly. Jhum or slash-and-burn is prevalent as the cropping pattern. It consists of the felling of jungles in which heaps of vegetation are levelled to the ground and basked to sun and air. Jungle clearing usually occurs in November. The debris are to be burnt. So in February the debris are reshuffled to enable the burning to take place soon. The people collect some fire-wood, bamboo and shrubs which are carried home but the mass is accumulated on the field. Burning of the jhums takes place in March. During the burning process, fire is lit with the help of torches from two or three directions in the field. The unburnt matter is again sunned for final burning. The field thus prepared sustains the crops for a couple of years after which the people shift to another field and repeat this process. Jhum cycle normally intervenes between six and nine years. The output during the second year of cultivation normally decreases from the first year's owing to the applicability of the law of diminishing returns in this slash-and-burn system. During the second year, the new field may have become necessary for the cultivation of main crops while the old field is reserved for the supplementary ones. The local cultivators argue that Jhum is the only applicable system in mountain country like theirs while agricultural experts argue that it is highly disadvantageous as it replenishes the fertility of the soil. Paddy, maize and millets are the main crops grown. Tapioca, gourds, arum plant, dioscorea, onion, leaf mustard, garlic, brinjals, sweet potatoes and potato also thrive. Cotton renowned from the hills also grows in the jhum. Many of these crops are sown in the months of March and April and precede the plantation of cotton which comes later on. Harvests intervene between July and December

although cotton is plucked until the month of February. Some of the seeds are sown broadcast, others just dibbled in little holes in which light scratches only are made. Paddy is sown broadcast. The first broadcast is wantonly done just after the jhums are fired. The second broadcasting of the plant is done more neatly in the holes prepared.

Of their implements, the axe, daos and some knives or daggers are used for jungle cutting. They do not have indigenous jumpers and digging tools except the iron hoes and choppers, scrappers and rakes of bamboo. Few households use sickles. Otherwise most of the crops are plucked by hands or with the help of daos. But with a handful of these appliances, they could undertake digging and chopping with tremendous success in which normally farms and plantations meet their needs sufficiently with crops. They have great physical power; they upturn their jungle-clad mountains with amazing speed to convert them into the plantation. In the plains they have more of the improved tools and implements. They have several planniers, baskets and trays to receive their grains. In their houses they gather the crops in barns. Some baskets are just woven of cane slips but others are finely polished as of cane fibres. Cotton is stocked in oblong rectangular baskets as tall as twice the height of the carrier tied to his back by his strap and supported on his forehead. Now a fraction of their merchandise has been moved through trucks and other vehicles.

Villages produce sufficiently for their own needs and the surplus thus obtained is transacted for trade. In times of scarcity, deplorable conditions are reported and the people manage to subsist by edibles collected from the jungle such as wild roots, tubers and plants. Prompt relief measures at times may have been difficult owing to the inadequate means of communication. The villages are widely scattered and people cover up a tedious march to attend weekly markets. The only transport line for so long was the Assam-Tura road and by the time the new State was inaugurated, other networks of communications were being undertaken to connect Tura with certain places. Other inter-district roads are yet to be taken up to cover the far-flung areas. People in the south were confronted with many difficulties during the post-Independence times owing to the suspension of trade with the erstwhile East Pakistan and cases of near starvations had been reported. The Government of Meghalaya

presently is trying to implement village re-grouping and make the villages more viable. The programme involved will be more successful if it is consistent with the pattern of land tenure, existing one and modified. The traditional norms will have to be envisaged and adjustment will be necessary. Some agricultural grants-in-aid and loans have been utilised by Garo farmers.

New patterns of cultivation which have evolved may be touched briefly. In some of the river valleys and the foothills, wet-rice terraces have been worked out during the last few decades. Permanent cultivation seems to be more fitting in when compared with jhum which entails shifting constantly. Orange and lemons have been cultivated at some places while fruits newly grown have fetched but small incomes to fruit growers. Other crops are areca-nuts and betel-vines grown on small-scale basis. Pine-apples thrive well. In the foothills as do their counter-parts in other plains, the Garos have used plough animals since time immemorial where a variety of paddy seeds is grown. In Tura some of the modern vegetables have been grown. Experiment may prove successful in respect of the introduction of jack-fruits, pumpkins, leech, guava and other varieties.

The wants of Garos are few. At the last century and until quite recently Garo cotton held the reputation of being one of the best grades largely exported outside India. With other fibres, it was manufactured into carpets while in the neighbouring regions, it was used for making good clothes, quilt and other things. No wonder that along the foot of the hills, several cotton markets had sprung and cotton brought from the hills were carried in hundred of boats to other places. Some of these markets are very old. Zamindars on the foothills adjoining Bangladesh captured the monopoly of Garo cotton trade. The Garos came in large teams, with their oblong baskets tied behind their backs; the load and the carrier were out of proportion so that the man 'is altogether lost in the vastness of his burden'. One writer wrote: 'You behold hundreds of these elongated baskets, apparently furnished with legs, walking to market'. Garo traders had traversed a long distance to reach and dispose of their merchandise. The other exports from the hills comprised lac, mats, chillies, plantains. These with cotton were bartered for cattle, fowls, dried fish, salt, other necessities and a few luxuries. Before the coming of the British raj, Zamindars'



foul play resulted in conflicts with the Garos who resorted to perpetrating raids into the zamindaris and avenge the Zamindars. At times they closed down trade and harassed the plains people until the latter sued up for peace and returned a hostage. The intermediary Garos who screened the plains from the highlanders were put to a dilemma as by a trade pact conducted, they were bound to assist the Zamindars while through blood relations, they were bound to pacify the Garos and procure a constant supply of that crop. The hill men's journey was full of dangers. An experience was put like this: "As a rule they defend themselves bravely and even the women do the heroic deeds. A man whose wife was trotting in front of him one afternoon, was suddenly seized and held beneath the tiger's paws. The woman, hearing his screams, dropped her basket, and clutching the dao that was in it, rushed to the rescue. Coming to the tiger, she lashed so vigorously at his head and face that he retired roaring the fray. The woman thus rescuing her husband took him home and dressed his wounds"<sup>1</sup> Many were the perils encountered during their passage to their markets or performance of journey outside the village.

Loans in rice are practised in the traditional fashion. The debtor charges, however, exorbitant rate of interest. In *ajak*, the rule is that one full winnowing basket of rice taken is returned in terms of six persons' work in one day at the debtor's field; the creditor, having not that number from his family, engage five other persons and with himself make six, while he has other more obligations to fulfil to helpers for a day. *Dena* seems to be same system which survives among some Naga tribes in which the creditor taking rice on loan has the obligation to return double the quantity which includes the interest charged upon. Wage is paid in meat.

The equivalent of Garo barter was as follows—

82 pounds of cotton equivalent of 5 pounds of rice or a bull.

2 pounds of rice equivalent of a fowl or a small puppy or a pigling.

There are weekly markets inside the district.

1. Garey: *Garo Jungle Book*, p. 31.

*Other Pattern*—Life in the markets is interesting. They have markets on the border as well as other hats distributed in the interior places of the district. Teams of the market-going people may have taken two or three days on the way. They may have stayed at the intermediary village or slept even on the roadside. They carry shalws to protect themselves from cold and utensils in which they cook their food along the road. In the market too, they cook the food, there being no restaurants in all markets. The market is opened and signalised by the beat of gongs. In the past, the people bartered goods among themselves. Now the transaction is largely in cash.

Life of the Garo man in the village is mostly confined to clearing the jungle, tilling the soil and reaping the harvest. He shares with his wife in carrying heavy logs, timber, fire-wood, bamboo and other loads. Women shoulder the less arduous work in the field and perform more domestic works including cooking, care of children and others. Now timber has been exploited in larger quantities to meet demands of the neighbouring regions. Domestication of animals, wicker-work and cotton-ginning are the traditional trends in the village life. Carpentry, stone crushing, mining have not become popular. There are of course transactions in trade between the villages. Weaving resembles the pattern of Naga or Arunachal tribes in which Garo women were experts in the past. The loom is like Naga<sup>1</sup>. The laddle for cotton ginning is called *Jin* or *Kherakha* with two spoons. Cotton ginning was more important than weaving.

*Arts and Crafts*—wood-crafts are not transacted for trade. They are age-old motifs of artistic, decorative and ceremonial value. The most prevalent is *Kima* which looks like a wooden statue or an effigy carved from a pole. The kima stands for the deceased of the house and, therefore, implies a belief in the ancestor-worship or glorification of the dead. It is dressed up with costume and armed with weapons or other implements. The household consider their Kimas sacred. There is no stone using although accessories such as anvils, grind stone and flint stone were in use till quite recently. Garos carve also many wooden and bamboo motifs.

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1. A few writers were of the opinion that weaving was absent in the past. As much as traditions throw light, it existed in all villages as compulsory undertaking of women.

*Linguistic and Ethnological*—Garo language is Bodo identified with Mech, Rabha, Kachari, Koch, Hajong, Dalu and Lalung. It belongs to Sino-Tibetan, Tibeto-Burman type, Bodo group. More recently Singpho and Konyak have been added to this class which is also known as Baric. Garos claim kinship with most of the groups of people mentioned above being separated from them just during their migration into Assam from the Himalayas. The peoples who had established powerful kingdoms in the past were Chutiya, Kachari and Koch although these languages have become less important. Kachari is also reduced. They have been absorbed with the stronger languages. According to a tradition, the kingdom in Tripura was founded by a tribal Koch an almost extinct language was the westward extension of Bodo and so Tripura is most southward group of this language. Bodo is the important language still spoken in Meghalaya.

It is possible that Atong and Koch belong to the same group or that Atong while maintaining its ethnological identity has largely been influenced by Koch in its vocabulary. Even Ruga is believed to have been influenced more by Garo than Koch<sup>2</sup>. There is a good deal of linguistic variance between central, eastern and western dialects in the district. Irrespective of a central position that Ambeng obtains, the medium of instruction has been Akawe reduced to writing before the shifting of a normal school from Damra in Goalpara District to Tura during the last quarter of the last century. Chisak, Akawe, Machchi, Dual are more mutually intelligible among themselves than between any one of them with Ambeng. But Ambeng has also been featured with dialectic variance. Me. gam is a Khasi dialect but this race has been influenced by some Garo customs.

Their complexion ranges from dark and tan to brownish. They display Mongoloid features. In physiques, Garos are near to the Singphos, resembling the latter in respect of dress, the head-band being largely used among women in both. They look like other Bodo speaking people also on their nearest confines. They are muscular, hardy and possess good limbs, characterised by flat nose or compressed lips.

2. Burling, *A Garo Grammar*, p. 80.

Garos are not different from other hill-men. There is not much variance in respect of village and house models, dress and ornaments, sports and festivals, religion and ritual, sports and festivals and other features. Their cross-cousin marriage is similar to the Singpho but the latter is patrilineal biased. On the other hand, the matrilineal customs of inheritance, succession to office of chieftains, theistic and animistic beliefs, divination and sacrifice resemble their counter-parts in Meghalaya, the Khasis. The customs of exhibiting grave-goods, raising of effigy and keeping of a torch of fire over the grave-yards are obtained from the Garo, some Naga and some Arunachal tribes. Head-hunting practice was very near to the Angami and other Naga tribes who observed the custom of burying the skull on being captured and disinterring it at a later time. The Garos once widespread left their marks of their ancient kingdoms, virile culture and social system on the Himalayas. They had many things in common with the Koch, Kachari, Chutiya and Tripura who had famous kingdoms in the past

*Village Organisation*—village Nokmas were powerful chiefs in the past; but the council in which elders from the clans or groups of clans sat, presided over by Nokmas, decided all issues such as foreign policy, war and peace, inter-village and land disputes and judicial cases. This council was called *Mela-Salbonga*. A king Nokmas assumed position because they held and managed them on behalf of their respective wives' maharis. The power of village Nokmas had been broken down after the annexation when Laskars were instituted by Government, entrusted to the collection of house tax and revenue with powers to decide petty cases while the Deputy Commissioner exercised over-all jurisdiction on behalf of the Government. The modern system of administration had been advantageous in breaking down the old village isolation and integrating the groups of people inside the district. Nokmas still supervise temporal affairs and were the authoritative interpreters of the local customary laws and customs of the people. Nephews succeed to the office of their maternal uncles in which through the system of their marriage, nephews attain that position. The Nokrom represents his wife's mahari and is entrusted with the maintenance and management of lands while he consults the mahari's representatives in vital issues as consistent with the sanction of the customary laws. Should any legitimate group of clan fail to provide heirs and heiresses, the next group of clan shall be eligible to officiate but:

the office devolves upon the oldest groups in order of precedence. Village Nokmas are the custodians of the village rites; they fix the dates of festival, organise the programmes, inaugurate the dance, donate sacrificial animals, timber, weapons and such accessories. They are supposed to be resourceful, having a large number of gongs for use at festivals, and their houses so elaborately decorated which keep them discernible from other houses. They give merits of feast. These are still characteristic social traits in non-Christian villages where more than half of the total population are non-Christian. The Laskars wield more administrative functions; the District Council in this connection has issued certain administrative rules and regulations in the district. Some of the present changes have been treated of at the next chapter.

Nokmas were supposed to be rich spiritually and possessed of the virtue, the sterling qualities of head and heart and proficient enough in oratory, military commandership and fulfilment of other responsibilities. Some Nokmas were sovereigns who possessed jurisdiction, by their sheer force and ability over hundreds of villages. But their ancient empires did not last long.

*Character* — Garos are cheerful and sociable. Other qualities such as honesty, modesty, truthfulness and hospitality are strong traits of their character. Garos are adventurous, brave and witty. They penetrated into beast infested jungles to collect timber and bamboo and caves and dens to obtain some boulders; the Garo does not bother going alone in the jungle and is not scared of animals and snakes. Their honesty is proved until today in that many houses in the villages and towns including Tura are left unlocked in which stealth, robbery and dacoity are unknown at least among Garos themselves. Social freedom and egalitarian feelings are dominant. The hot weather and the malarious character of the place may have been disadvantageous in making people lazy and easy-going. Fear of corruption and bribery, however, has started to gain ground. On the whole the Garos have been able to keep intact many of their ancient qualities and moral character, a feature not noticeable among the other tribes who are apt to lose such heritage in the upheavals, stress and strains of the modern transformation. Even non-Christians are God-fearing as is evident in the solemn sacrifice they perform and sacred invocations they make. God

is the Source of life and light, the Source of rains and harvest, the Author of all arts and crafts and the Fountain of power and strength. This religious concept is sought to be demonstrated at all levels of their consciousness which imbibe them a philosophy of their religion. There is no idolatry.

*Social Change*—Social change has been demonstrated at many levels, having emerged from three important factors, namely, the coming of Christianity, the role of the modern administration and the spread of education. It was 100 years now exactly that the Garo Hills District was fully consolidated into the British administration after the Independent area was added to the district formed in 1866. It was just at that decade that Christianity came along into the land of the Garos.

The first date of Christian conversion was February 8, 1863 when Omed and his nephew, Ramke embraced the new faith and were baptised. But it was at Gauhati they were baptised by the American Baptist Mission and not at their hills. They hailed from Dambora in the north-eastern areas of the district. Probably they were Akawes and the first Garo Christians. They belonged to that first batch of Garo boys who attended the school at Goalpara and the first literates before being baptised. They had learnt to read and write in Bengali. Besides, with the support of the Mission, they were the first missionaries into their country and for several occasions, they were mocked at and challenged by their countrymen for preaching the alien faith. Ramke had accepted the task to start a school at Damra in Goalpara District and Omed shouldered the work in introducing the new faith to the people on the foothills. With the help of his family members, Ramke started a school at Damra in 1864. Omed stayed below the Rajasimla pass. He went from place to place to preach the gospel. On one occasion at Rongjuli market, he escaped with bruises when he was assaulted by the market people; he would have been killed but for the police who intervened and thereby rescued him. On another market day, C.D. Morton, Deputy Commissioner, Goalpara District, in person rescued him. Another Garo added to the first tiny flock was Rangu baptised in April 1866 at Gauhati. Meanwhile other Garos had embraced Christianity.

A landmark was on the 14th and 15th April, 1867 when within these dates, 37 persons were baptised at the Rajasimla

valley, the missionary, Bronson coming over to baptise them. Damra in 1867 had a congregation of 40 souls. These were the beginnings. The faith spread to the neighbouring places such as Sonaram, Chotchalsa and Addokiri and later on Nishangram<sup>1</sup> and Derek. The missionaries repaired visits into the first Christian area. In 1868, Dr. Stoddard an American missionary, made a first trip into Tura for exploring the possibility of starting the mission. He followed this up with another visit of Tura in 1871 in which two other missionaries, Comfort and Bronson, joined; they travelled for thirteen days from the plains partly on boat, partly on foot and partly by ponies. Nothing however came out immediately. The Tura mission came to be started by Rev. Elnathan Phillips and Rev. Marcus C. Mason. They came for a first visit to Tura in 1875 in which they received great help from Capt. Williamson, Deputy Commissioner. Phillips was the real founder when he came up the hills and took up his residence at Tura in December 1876. He was accompanied by a few Garo workers from the plains. His wife from the plains joined in March 1877. In March 1878 the mission took over the management of education into its hands, and the normal school from Damra was shifted to Tura in which Ramke was the head-master. Mason later on joined the Tura mission. A lady, Miss Russel was added in 1879.

Sonaram in 1876 started a school at Chatcholja which developed into a Christian village community. The gospel at Adokgiri was introduced by two Christian workers resulting from the baptism of 8 persons on May 17, 1872 by Omed. A school was established. Derek also started from a school. Nishangram school was started in 1892.

Village schools rapidly increased. Some belonged to the Mission, others belonged to the villages who maintained them. The need for education was felt by Garos. The Government had placed large funds at the disposal of the Mission and handed over all the educational affairs to the Missionaries. Phillips and Mason were in charge of education<sup>2</sup>. By 1910-11, Garos had supported their own independent schools with Rs.

1 The etymological interpretation of *Nishan* is flag which means the village bearing its flag hoisted on its ground.

2. Even before 1870, Government had sanctioned a grant of Rs 250 for the publication of books and Rs 50 p.m. was sanctioned for the maintenance of a Normal school at Damra.

700 and contributed 40% of the total amount incurred for the running of schools of the Mission. The central Mission school had become M.E. in 1905. The Mission awarded stipends to poor school children but later on, stipends were largely confined only to more meritorious pupils. Normal course covered imparting instructions in reading, writing, spelling, arithmetic, scripture and proficiency in Bengali and English (as at the first instance Garo had been reduced to writing in Bengali). Extra-curricular activities covered cotton-ginning, building and clearance, jungle cutting and road clearing as fulfilment of obligations of contracts entered to with Government. Among those trained in USA, mention may be made of Thangkan Sangma (1882-1884), M. G. Momin (1891-1894) and B. G. Momin (1910-1914) deputed by the Missionaries whereas J.D. Marak, one of the active Catholic workers, at his own expense, prosecuted study in USA (1905-11). Among the enlightened ladies, mention is made of Dobaki, niece of Ramke who was appointed Matron of the Girls' boarding at Tura in 1902. The gospel reached the Ambengs and Matchis and later on covered the far-flung groups in the territory.<sup>1</sup> We know from our tradition that from 1918-19 many Garos were baptised by Rev. Dor Singh of the Presbyterian church towards the western side of Khasi Hills. Later on these Garo churches, on mutual decision, were handed over to the Baptist convention of the Garos.<sup>2</sup> In Mymensing, the Australian Mission spread its work.

The coming of the administration and establishment of the mission were the beginnings of the modern social history of Garo people. The education imparted in their mother-tongue was properly utilised by Garo men and women. The Government took legal and coercive steps to wipe out the practice of head-hunting, slavery and human sacrifice but Christianity supplied the moral force. In course of time the church made more impact.

Changes are perceptible in many spheres characterised by the steady decrease of barter and increase of currency, growth of wet-rice terraced cultivation, modern vegetable and fruit

1. W. Garey, *The Garo Jungle Book* contains many interesting informations on the growth of the church but does not make efforts to sublimate traditions and cultural traits of the Garos to an appreciable extent.

2. Bareh, *History and Culture of Khasi People*, chapter VIII. (Revised edition)



cultivation, growth of weaving, and increase in roadside trade and traffic. This phenomenon permeated only a fringe of society but gathered on momentum in the passage of time. The traditional and customary aspects go side by side. On the whole the change is evolutionary than revolutionary especially in respect of rural economy. With the spread of education, was gone the old village concept of isolation. New social features, tastes, moods and other aspects receive weighed consideration. One of the reasons which retarded educational progress was absence of high school institutions for which not until 1940 or so, a high school was set up at Tura. The development was the growth of literature.

Keith and Bronson for the first time reduced Garo to writing in the Bengali characters. Bronson had contacted Garos in Goalpara District. Certain publications came out. No doubt the Garos on both sides were acquainted with Bengali and Assamese in which they spoke fluently. A Garo Primer was the first book in Garo published before 1870. A *catechism* followed, Gospel literature was prepared, the four gospels being translated by local Garo pundits being published in 1876. Rev. T.J. Keith supervised the translation. Mason and Phillips undertook the translation of the rest of the New Testament which was over in 1894. The missionaries wrote grammars and dictionaries such as M. Bronson, *Phrases in English and Garo*, 1868, T.J. Keith, *Dictionary of the Garo Language*, 1873, T. J. Keith, *Outline Grammar of the Garo Language*, 1874 & Rev. M. Ramkhe, *Bengali-Garo Dictionary*, 1887. They were the earliest works on Garo language. Others included adaptations to arithmetic, hygiene and ethical lessons for the use in schools. Conditions, however, made it difficult to continue the Bengali characters. The phonetic structure, difficulties to learn three languages at a time by school children, technical and other printing difficulties and time involved, necessitated a change-over to Roman alphabet as it was in Naga Hills when the language was from the first time reduced to writing in the Roman alphabet, the first book that came out being a hymn book in Ao by Godhula, an Assamese evangelist (1872 to 1879). Naga Hills came under the sphere of the same Mission. The alphabet was switched over to Roman and ever since this took effect, a rapid increase in the number of books was seen. This change-over occurred during the last decade of the last century and all the Garo publications came out in the Roman alphabet from 1902. A hymn book in

Garo was published in 1900. In all these, local collaborators had a share in the preparation of books and much of the money available from both Mission and Government funds was incurred towards the publication. Other societies such as Queen Victoria Memorial Fund, Bible Translation Society of London, Christian Literature Society of India came to assist in the publication and distribution of some books. Dr. Stephen Smith from New York contributed the amount of Rs. 14,000 towards a construction of a Book room at Tura in 1906 in memory of his wife. The other publications were a *Garo Grammar*, *Garo Arithmetic* and the story of *Queen Victoria*.

Besides, the monograph entitled *The Garos* by Playfair, 1909 was an important contribution on the subject.

Translation of the Bible was going on steadily. Text books amended of the previous school series came on and increased in course of time. In consequence of these and other factors, Garo is now included in B.A. course as Modern Indian language. Various monthlies were born. They were started first as Christian monthlies entitled *Achikna Ripeng* (1897), *Pring Prang* (1912) and *Sangba* (1933). Later on *Achik Kurang* and other news-papers (secular) were born and circulated. The former is a work of power which provides incentives to the various forms of prose, and poetry and writings on culture biased subject-matter. Contributions from the ellistic group increased in course of time. Even before Independence, some of the books were of cultural and educational importance. They derive inspiration from their rich local folk-lore. In these circumstances, some models in poetry and drama were inborn. Cultural persons were concerned with utilising their indigenous stuff to reflect arts (music and literary), tales, adventures and experience, historical and philosophical subject-matter. Something has been done to evolve educational propaganda towards modernising their local institutions while holding fast the good and creative aspects of their culture and traditions. Garo educators themselves have made important contributions to the dissemination of education and evoked the growth of literature. The Garo local writers have produced vast and varied forms of literature extending to various school subjects, poetry, drama,

short stories, folk-lore in which their contributions are immense.<sup>1</sup>

Recently the Catholics have set up important educational centres and other institutions at Tura, Bagmara, Dalu, Mendi-pathar and Damra. They have other contributions to make. Fr. Binazza is said to have started this mission with the help of Mr. J. Diengdoh. Later on Mr. Jobang Marak came in and assisted. He was an educator and writer. His son was Denizen, Professor of English in Cotton College in the forties. The Mission was founded in the thirties. Besides, there is the Seventh Day Adventist.

The District Council set up 20 years ago has also important contributions. It imparts training in the art of self-government. It has taken up some welfare works, road transport, primary education and introduced innovations in farming systems. Its court decides civil cases. The Tura college for the last two decades has contributed to the growth of higher education whereas prior to its establishment, students were scattered at various places for prosecuting higher studies. Other development schemes and projects launched by the Government have been of immense service.

Social change, norms and needs come with the proper adjustment to modern life. The British administration with its uniform pattern at the district level, enforcement of uniform code of laws, opening of the district to the outside world through various agencies have an important role. Christians have largely departed from their old religious beliefs, sacrifices and ceremonies. No doubt Christianity has brought reversals in marriage, birth and death ceremonies while yet the laws of inheritance, land tenure, property holding, household organisation and civic life have not changed materially. Christianity lays emphasis more on the spiritual union than social connotation of the marriage. It is true in Christian villages, we find a church taking the place of the old altar, a school instead of the Nokpante.

1. To mention best known writers, they are D.S. Nengminsa, Samison K. Sangma, Wilson K. Marak, Dhoronsing K. Sangma, Dewan Sing Rongmothu, Keneth Momin. The best poets were Tuniram, R. Marak, Gelo Sangma, Kosan G. Momin.

I have a separate edition of *Garo Literature* ready for publication.



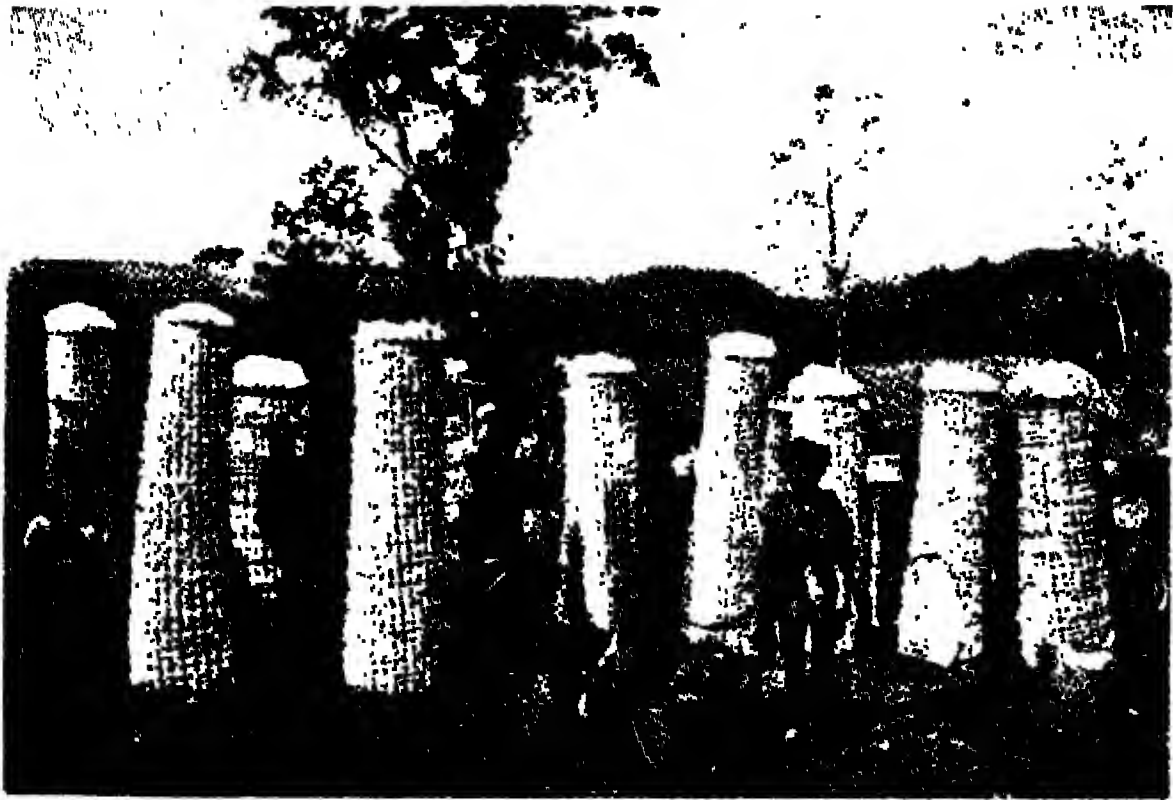
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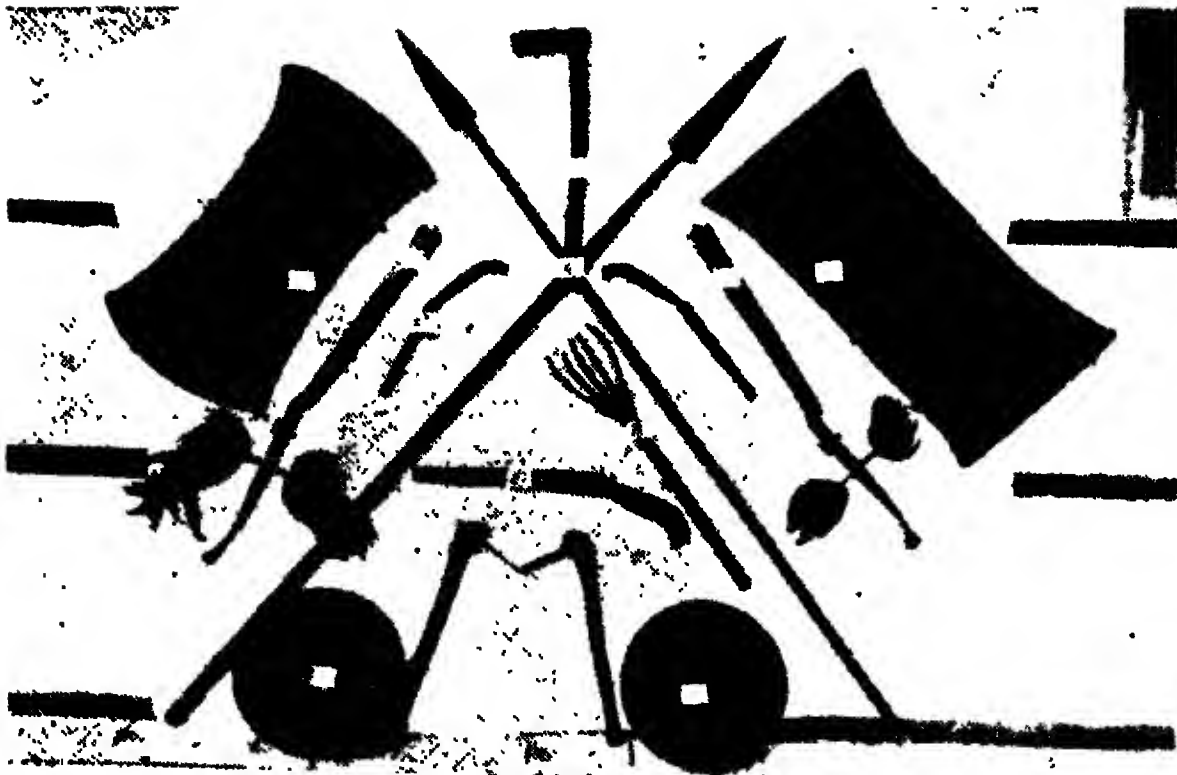
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There have been changes in the circulation of crops and products; there have been increases in the coming in of various goods, necessities and luxuries in the District. Christian festivals have replaced tribal in many places. But the great proportion of the population has not yet been converted and so in non-Christian villages, the traditional structure still has vigorous meaning and expression. For instance Garo Christians adopt their traditional dances, songs and music derived from their own composition when celebrating Christmas of fortnight long extending to the new year week.

Changes have become perceptible in Christian and ellistic circles. There has been noticeable change in house building which obtains from Tura, advanced villages and especially the plains of Kamrup and Goalpara. Use of corrugated iron, sanitary provisions, ventilated rooms, modern furnitures have become prevalent and considerable improvement is seen in the traditional patterns of houses. The households take care to keep their house and bodies clean. The taste for western music has permeated towns and advanced villages as well but Christians still hum their old folk tunes and continue their arts of music and dance. Christians in some places bury their dead in their own compounds although at other places cemeteries have been provided. Changes in patterns of dress and ornaments have been discussed earlier. Change in dietary has become applicable in which besides relishing their traditional food, new methods of cooking, frying and preparations of meal in combination with other condiments have become perceptible. New sports have been current in many places. Garos have more of cotton-ginning than weaving. Mechanised farming is yet new to the masses of people. Weaving, limestone excavation, fruit plantation and weaving are just emerging and the rural economy on the whole follows its own pattern.

The question posed before the intelligentsia is, in what manner, social transformation can be caused to bring about a brighter future? How the benefit of such transformation be rightly reaped so that traditional values are upheld? What sort of customs and traditions which are rather deteriorating, in context of the present needs, have to be assessed. Time will answer this. The success of launching such desired transformation is conditioned by the emergence of an active team of enlightened persons for disseminating educational propaganda and secondly

the emergence of the constructive reformers and social leaders for causing such regeneration. Khasis and Garos have similar problems in this respect. Destiny has brought them together. Action has to be concerted on the same lines. Social values, traditions and institutions shall have to be established on a sound footing against the local factors. There is need to launching more constructive than agitational politics. This is a call which pressess us today; who shall come out to answer it and accept the challenge?

That the Garos and Khasis have been brought together is not a matter of political coincidence, nor can this be ascribed to their common matrilineal customs which survives as an island. It rests on antecedental grounds, tradition had it in the past, their concerted action saved their hills from many invasions. On one occasion the forefathers of the two people, hundreds of years ago, observed this jubilant occasion with feasts, dances and games and cemented their eternal alliance by planting a stone pillar on the bank of the Simsang river. Rangmothu writes that the stone has eternal message as inscribed below:

‘This is the call out to the unborn generation of the A. Chiks and the Khasis! Mark well, ye future men and women of the eternally united A. Chik-Khasi Race, that “irresistible strength lies in unity and that the future does not belong to the men and women who doubt, but to those who believe and to those who have faith. Yes indeed, the future does not belong to the timid but to the brave; it does not belong to the mean and to the wicked but to the strong and the noble; it does not belong to those who hate but those who love” ’.<sup>1</sup>

*Other Garo settlements*—there are many Garo villages in Goalpara and Kamrup plain. In Kamrup, Garos are found in Ranibari near Mawdem, Baraigoan Ookian bordering on Rambrai and Nongkhlaw States, Malang Dubi (bordering on both Khasi and Garo Hills), Demarangbolgoli, Gohalkona and Kinangson. Those in the Goalpara District are found at Nishangram, Derek and other places. part of it bordering on Garo Hills and part of it under Goalpara. Gohalkona has been a large Garo centre and the venue for Garo inter-village meeting. Kinangson is also a reception centre for Garo

1. *Folk-Tales of The Garos*, p 337.

delegates during conferences held, from Sadiya, Kamrup and Goalpara. In Khasi Hills, Garos are settled down in Rambrai, Nongstoin, Mawiang and other western states. They are also found at Jorabad under the Myllem Syiemship. Many live at Arodonga and Balat in Khasi Hills. Many in the plains have become Christian.

Garos with their age-old settlement in Goalpara and Kamrup have improved techniques of cultivation. They use plough animals for paddy cultivation. They cultivate jute, cotton, areca-nuts, betel-vines, local vegetables, mango and jack-fruits. Lac is also grown. They grow banana at some intensive scale in the plains and transact them for trade. Orange grows well in the Khasi border; Boraigoan, Kinangsong and Santipur are the leading orange producing centres. This orange is of inferior variety unlike the one brought from Cherra and Jowai side. Garo and some of the Khasi oranges are sold at Gauhati. Women are engaged in weaving during the slack agricultural seasons. Sericulture has also been undertaken for obtaining *muga*. From cane, men turn out cones, mats, baskets and containers. Bamboo cutting and felling of jungle is usually done by male persons. Nishangram is the Garo academic centre in the plain having the first Garo high school while Kinangsong has the second high school in this zone. The people live in the big houses, some which are stilt and some which are mechang structures.

In the Upper Assam valley there are Garo settlements, mention of which may be made of Sarupathar and Sadiya. The immigrants who now are settled at Sarupathar came there only after 1900 from Garo villages such as Baghmara, Deli, Dalma and Resubelpara. The reasons of their immigration are not known; perhaps the non-availability of land or food scarcity may have caused the movement of this people for over more than 200 miles for Mikir Hills District. They manage to buy lands from the local people and turn out farms and wet rice fields. Most of them are Christians. They have schools and manage to bring Garo books from the book centre in Tura. They have got about 150 to 200 families. One Garo M.D.C. represents them in the Mikir Hills District Council. It is heartening to note that besides being hard working, many Garos there have utilised other opportunities to improve their lot. I have been told by Mr. Alex D. Sangma, the renowned personage that mechanised farming and fruit nurseries may properly develop.



Garos at Sadiya have a larger population with about 400 or 500 families settling there. Garos in the plains are experts in paddy cultivation. They grow vegetables and fruits and those in Surapathar cultivate jute as one of their cash crops. Cultivation is shared both by women and men, men take initiative for trade and business on small scale and look after the more arduous undertaking in farming; women do some weaving. Ornamental beads are brought from outside but they forge them into their own pattern for wear.

Garos in Mymensing belong to the same kinship known as Abeng and Atong and still use that title. During the Mogul period, it was known that many Garos had occupied that area to tap the forest resources and a few persons were engaged as contractors under the zamindars but many also worked themselves, being the virtual land owners. Garos in the plains undertook miscellaneous occupations in arts and crafts, carpentry, architecture, elephant catching and were good in wet-rice cultivation, Garo Cotton from the hills was renowned since time immemorial and until quite recently a bulk of it went to England. Garos in Mymensing were much better off owing to their contact with the business centres. Some had been partially Hinduised during the long state of settlement. Christians on the other hand use Bengali Christian hymns and scriptures. The inheritance appeared to have been a bit different owing to the growth of independent families in context of the strict matrilineal customs which survived in the hills. The census in 1961 shows that 190,901 out of the total population of 2,42,075 in the district were Garos while 50,000 Garos lived in other parts of Assam and about 40,000 in Pakistan.<sup>1</sup>

There are Garos who live at Dimapur, Nagaland. Many are found at Tripura.

## II. *Khasi and Jaintia*

Indigenous inhabitants include :

(a) *Khyntiam* of the central Khasi plateau,

1. There are a few other smaller communities such as Rabha, Hajong who also claim Kinship with Garos. In the Block and P.W.D. centres, and Tura town itself, the population is mixed. Besides, refugees, in large groups, have been rehabilitated from time to time.

- (b) *Pnar* of Jaintia Hills called Jaintia, known as *Synteng*.
- (c) *War* on the southern extremity
- (d) *Bhoi* on the north.

Those Wars and Bhois in Jaintia Hills are known as War Syntengs and Bhoi Syntengs respectively.

The other tribes are the Mikir on the north, Lalung, Viate, Vaiphe and Hmar in small numbers in the Jaintia Hills District. Rabhas and Garos are found on the north. Aijong or Hajong people are sparsely distributed on the south. The Lyngngams or Megams on the west is an admixed Garo-Khasi tribe. Bengalees form the majority of non-tribals at Shillong town whose number has increased with the coming in of refugees from the erstwhile East Pakistan. Other non-tribals are Assamese mostly Government officials and Merwaris who handle a considerable trade. There are several Nepalis who reside in Shillong in different vocations and quite a number of them live as graziers on the Bhoi region.

### Household organisation

Mother kinship is dominant and inheritance is matrilineal. The tribe is a conglomerate of clans, each tracing lineage from the ancestral mother, the founder of the clan. The mother is the custodian of family rites and property; she is succeeded by her youngest sister who becomes the keeper of the property and the organiser of the family rites in which she can improve the pattern of this residence but cannot part it off. Thus a form of ultimogeniture survives. Her elder sisters also secure shares of inheritance in the form of landed or family property, jewelleries and ornaments, vessels and other articles of household furniture and goods, but the largest share (including the mother's residential house) is hers.

The elder sisters generally move with their respective husbands, but the youngest daughter's husband stays in her residence, the custom being matrilocal whether temporary or permanent. In the event there is a single daughter, she will get the entire property. If there be no daughter, the ancestral residence goes to the elder sister's lineage, but if the woman has become clanless, a girl is adopted and becomes integrated into

the family kinship pattern, inheritance thereby being reverted in her person to the same group. There are however exceptions as modern trends indicate. The self-acquired property of the couple, discernible from the ancestral one, may be entitled to a son or shared among the sons if there be no daughter in the house. In another case, a capital may have been provided by the mother to her son in case his wife is poor for establishing himself and his family. Again, wealthy parents now-a-days do give shares to their sons although in smaller proportions against the larger reserved for the daughter and entitling such recipients to transmit the property thus bequeathed to his wife's kinship lineage. This is a reversal of the old customary laws which forbade the carrying out of capital or any kind of property to his wife's house which, at the most, needed to be returned to his mother if he had taken it. Sons otherwise get only small gifts with personal belongings taken out when they are married. Now-a-days, if a man shares with his mother any business, he gets a dividend.<sup>1</sup> The father has the right to transmit his self-acquired property after his marriage to his children. He, as much as the mother, has the right to conduct his children's affairs; if he earns jointly with his wife, both will manage the house. If through his self-acquired property (*Kamai Khun*) he has made provisions for his children by constructing houses or purchasing plots of lands or grove or fields, they remain his until he has made a formal division into them. He may have it registered if he liked. But if he has started business with capital supplied by his wife, the latter apparently has a greater voice in the management of the house. If she possesses ancestral or self-acquired property in greater proportion, he becomes *U Nongriapetlem* (adviser or assistant) in the management of her property.

A great portion of the bachelor's earning *Kamai Khynraw* goes to his mother before marriage but he is not prevented from transferring a small proportion of it on marriage to his wife for starting life with her nor his wife after marriage, can prevent him from transferring a portion of his earning (*Kamai iing khun*) to his mother if she deserves his assistance. In the Khasi tradition, a woman is *Ka Nongri ling*, i.e., keeper of the house (custodian

1. In some cases, men are more proficient in industrial managements than women which necessitate the acquisition of skills by sons if not nephews.

or trustee), the man *Rangbah uba da* (protector). He exercises a dual function as *U Knii*, i.e., maternal uncle (councillor) for his mother's kin and *U Kpa* (the father) at his wife's home. If she dies, generally he remains with his children as during her lifetime. In the war (Southern) areas, the father has got more authority at his home since his children are eligible to obtain shares of property from him, it might be the one that has been inherited from his mother. Not so with the Nonglum, Khyriam and Khasis proper.

The youngest daughter is strictly the custodian but not possessor of family property. She might dispose of some articles of property but not the ancestral residence. She performs religious household ceremonies. Yet her greater duty is to take care of her aged parents. She is in charge of the family sepulchres. In Christian families, she still exercises her moral duties and obtains the biggest portion although she has no longer real religious duties to perform. But she acts under limits since she cannot go against the decision of her maternal uncles or family council under whose advice she carries out her duties. The exercise of powers by males generally is not so vital in many cases today. Her uncles or, failing them, her elder brothers in the original customs, act as her councillors and give instructions for the good behaviour of her children, in addition to performing their duties in bringing up their children with their respective wives. The residential house of the youngest daughter is not counted as her private or personal property; it is an ancestral property. The youngest daughter's house forms a meeting place of her kith and kin. She is bound to take care of her unmarried brothers and sisters. She is the guardian of the parentless and homeless members of her family; the mother acts as a moral force to unite the family, the spiritual head.<sup>1</sup>

In the Jaintia Hills, the form obtained is not conjugal like Garo and Khasi, but the Pnar or Jaintia form is more dualocal as the father is titular, leaving total family responsibilities to his wife, all his earning being integrated with that of his mother's and to his wife he renders a normal provision (*bai kait*) only. Therefore daughters do not inherit to their parents' property but get it from their maternal uncle and brothers. But to-day,

1. The above duties and obligations of the youngest daughter are in consonance with the sanction of the original customary laws. Conditions obtained from the present change and effects of the present transformation are also dealt with in the last chapter.

the growth of conjugal system as of Khasi pattern and the development of nuclear families is social trend of noticeable growth among Christians leading to corporate living and supervisory care of both husband and wife over their children. It is a departure from the Jaintia original system. This also applies to Synteng male persons marrying in the house of *Khadduhs* (youngest) daughter in Khasi Hills.

The war system of inheritance (in the southern Khasi Hills) offers a contrast to the main matrilineal system that prevails in the uplands. There in the war areas, both men and women inherit property which is divided amongst brothers and sisters. In many places, the youngest daughter acts as the keeper of the house, and in return for the extra-responsibility, she is given a larger portion of the property. She is in-charge of *Ri-Shyeng*, a plot of land assigned to religious use. An eldest brother acts as manager of family lands and for this, he is allotted a plot of land called *Ri Nongsaid* for his family's use. In the war areas, we observe, both sons and daughters are liable to inherit not only to their mother's property but also their father's. Children have the right to work in the mother's as in the father's garden. The youngest daughter as the custodian of the family lands cannot prevent her brothers and sisters from planting fruit trees and crops in the fallow portions of those lands nor can she prevent their children from reaping the fruits borne by those trees. In the war area, the people are mainly cultivators of fruits and other crops. In the Jaintia war areas, the system of inheritance is similar to that of the Khasi uplands, the eldest sister securing a larger proportion in recognition of her care of her younger brothers and sisters. But the youngest daughter gets the largest portion.

It should be noted that women though in-charge of family property, have no voice in public affairs. Normally women do not succeed to the office of a chieftain except in special circumstances occasioned by the absences of male rulers in which a few women who officiated in the office, proved themselves great and capable. It may be pointed out that in many places, men are partners with women not only in performing outdoor works such as looking after their fields or gardens or business concern but also in the conduct of domestic duties.

Few managing the joint affairs of the clan, a council of the clan, as in Garo, (which members of the clan or a group attend),

is scheduled to meet from time to time to dispose of vital issues such as disputes inside the clan, settlement of landed property and arranges the sending of a delegate representing the clan to the State Durbar (Council). There are lands known as *Ri-kur* or an estate which falls under joint ownership and control of the various families which form a clan. The clan usually appoints a senior maternal uncle to act as its manager. The profit that comes from the produce is shared by the daughters though the largest share is reserved for the youngest daughter.

The great difference with Garo system is that heir marriage or marriage by capture is absent while heir marriage seems to be beneficial in promoting stability in affairs of the household, in which the true father and maternal uncle are combined in a man, he being symbolic of the union between the two meharis, in which there is apparently less chance of any friction occurring between them.

The vitality of the true matrilineal system seems to have largely disintegrated owing to the stress and strains of the present social contacts. It was true that the maternal uncle in the past was bound to wield influence over his own clan or group in which he became a moral force. Under that system, women as in the case of Garos were only title-holders but men were pivots of the households. A most senior uncle, or failing him, his younger brother or brothers exerted influence over his sister's family. Girls could never violate important rules such as leaving away their hearths and homes without a team of male escort to guard them. Again he was to provide fighting men when wars knocked. He decided family disputes in order to avoid referring the matter to the civil court. He exercised moral influence during the distribution of property among his nieces in keeping with the customs. The household conformed to certain established norms of discipline and orderliness and was thus integrated with an effective and viable social unit.

### **Marriage**

Elaborate marriages are preceded by betrothals in which the would-be-groom accompanied by close relations from both the mother's and father's side, proceed to the bride's house and in the presence of representatives from the would-be-bride's side, a ceremony is performed symbolised by the handing over of a

ring to the bride by a groom. But cases are reported where an exchange of rings is also practised at some places. Avuncular representatives from both sides cite mutual addresses as of reciprocal form that no clan taboo persists among the two houses which qualifies the proposed marriage to take place.

The marriage is performed at the bride's place. Usually a month or a few weeks earlier, all the arrangements are decided. At both houses, feasts are held but the party at the bride's place is larger. Decorations and arches are also more elaborate at the girl's place. During the three days preceding the wedding, the groom avoids visiting the girl's place. On the morning of the wedding day, the bride's party sends items of the dainties with meat, pulou to the groom's house in baskets and vessels.

All arrangements are made in advance. The groom in a retinue which comprises his maternal uncles, father and his brothers, the groom's brothers, nephew and other relations and his friends, march to the house of the bride. Half way the party are met by representatives from the girl's side to welcome them. An exchange of betel-nuts takes place amongst them. The marriage centres round the citations of contracts between the *Ksiang* or spokesmen, the pouring of beers from two respective vessels and the priest then holds three pieces of dried fish as a token of solemnisation and the ceremony is over by their placing over the roof of the house. All present partake in a grounded rice which serves as wedding bread. Sumptuous meals are served. Drum-beats and blowing of pipes symbolise the marriage ceremony in some cases. Female kirs, i.e., mother, aunts, sisters and nieces of the groom never go with him on the wedding day but are in their house to entertain other friends and relations.

At Jowai, the marriage occurs after dusk, the groom being brought to the bride's place in a company bearing wood-pine torches along the way. There are exchanges of marriage contracts and pouring of libations but they are not elaborate as in the Khasi case. The groom in Khasi marriages provides part of the bride's dress and ornaments. The dress is different from both ordinary and dancing in which wedding white raiments are used, the bride apart from wearing a Jainsem, etc., may keep a white wrapper tied on the body and a bunch of flower tied on her head. Divorce cases are not absent; conditions are not

rigid to obtain a divorce. There are rules relating to the division of property and disposal of other things at a formal divorce.

Marriages are both family arranged and love. Generally the latter dominates the present matrimonial ties; the system of concubinage in which the couple seek to settle down without a formal marriage also prevails. The couple having developed acquaintance generally report the matter to their respective parents who seek to consummate it into marriage; if they fail to secure the consent from both sides, concubinage may develop.

Three days after marriage, the couple visit the groom's parents handing over to them some fruits, bananas and other food-stuffs. The groom now takes over all his possessions and presents from his parents to his in-laws' place. Some of the personal belongings may have been taken already at the wedding.

## Religion

\* Khasi religion in the beginning was apparently monotheistic. Traditions maintain that God the Creator (*U Blei Nongthaw*) was at first worshipped. He is represented by a Goddess, *Ka Blei Synshar*. There is an interesting legend which recounts the story of the origin of the race as follows: -

The ancestral progenitors of the Khasis were the seven families or seven clans (*Hynniew Trep*) who came down from heaven to inhabit this earth. They resided at first on the top of the Sohpetbneng peak which had a golden ladder joined to heaven. These treps (families) never left their settlement. They were kith and kin of the celestial *Khyndai Trep* (nine clans or families) who were associated with God as his messengers. The story states that the nine celestial Treps used to pay visit to the earth during the day time through a ladder and returned to heaven at sunset. The nine clans from heaven thus maintained daily contacts with our ancestors. The main occupation of the seven clans was cultivation. But later on, they sinned and broke their allegiance to God. In consequence of their sin, the connection with heaven was severed that the sun shone no more and an overwhelming darkness spread over the earth.

At this stage, the children of the Hynniew Trep looked up to God for mercy. A mediator, the cock (*U Syiar*) came forward and said he would save the human beings and through



his mediation, the connection being again restored, though not to the extent as before. Thus the cock is addressed as 'a son of the Goddess' and 'the liberator of mankind', and stands a true sacrificial animal, the symbol of the true Khasi religious faith. The divine origin of the Khasis is recounted in this tradition.

The Khasis glorify their dead as they have become supernatural beings and are ordained of the deity to assist the living ones to obtain blessings. Therefore they are invoked in the persons of the ancestral mother (*lawbei*), the revered father (*Thawlang*) and the maternal uncle (*U Suidnia*). The stone memorials are erected to perpetuate their memory. Funeral ceremonies would cost accurate and ritual observance so that the spirit of the dead would reach the house of God where, in eternal comfort and happiness, it would be integrated with the other spirits, the next of kin. Therefore, great care is taken to preserve the corpse at home (usually retained for three days) before cremation. For longer preservation, in the case of State dignitaries, the corpse is first embalmed with liquors and honey and then kept inside a wooden coffin enclosure which is connected with a pipe to the ground below to drain out all the decay and decomposition. All religious performances such as animal sacrifice, offerings of food to the dead, prayers and addresses are very strictly observed. Rich people construct an elaborate and luxurious bier of various colours, embellished with decorations. A special pyre platform is raised decked with gorgeous decorations. The most important funeral ceremony is the collection, immediately after cremation, of the bones which are wrapped in a piece of white cloth and then laid inside a small cairn. The cairn where the ashes are kept is a temporary resting place for the remains are afterwards transferred to a permanent family cromlech. Therefore, on some occasions the collection of bones from the separate cairns is performed by families for final disposal inside the cromlech of the entire clan or its group. Such ceremonies are associated with the driving away of evil spirits, offerings of food and thanks-giving ceremonies to the deceased, monolithic erections, dancing and other celebrations. It is believed that souls which earned righteous life go to heaven and become united with the predecessors, while bad souls go to hell, a subterranean world where evil spirits are assembled (*Khyndai pateng niamra*).

Traditions state that subsequently, Khasi religion became corrupted as a result of an inherent fear of fiends, ghosts and malevolent spirits who had to be propitiated, thus leading to an infiltration of animistic fits. Thus nature worship emerged and propitiation of numerous water and mountain spirits started. The belief gained ground of the power of those deities to guard the people from epidemics, foreign invasion and bad harvests. The worship of water and mountain spirits was observed from time to time in the form of local and family sacrifices.

Another characteristic feature is the divination and the ordeal system. Among the various devices of finding out the will of God, breaking of eggs on a wooden board is the most popular. The diviner reads the auguries by breaking the eggs, the signs and omens being read through the relative position of the broken egg-shells on the board both concave and convex. Another method is examination of the entrails of a fowl. By this method, various signs like shortcomings before God and diseases, death and bad fortune are indicated. On the other hand, good signs like health, fortune and prosperity may be also indicated. Other forms of divination are also adopted occasionally.

The Khasis perform thanks-giving ceremonies frequently. In such ceremonies, the people appease both the goddess and other deities (*ki phan ki kyrpad*) who are believed to have been authorised to assist the family. They raise an earth altar on which they smear the blood of a sacrificed animal and on it, cast some pieces of its entrails. But they must appease the Goddess (with prayers and offerings) first before performing rites to the deities (*Ka phan ki kyrpad*); as because the highest acts of reverence first are due to the goddess which indicate theistic elements.

The people observe fertility rites associated with dances and songs. In Nartiang various rites are observed in different months of the year such as *Knia Khang* in March (to protect the crops from being injured by evil spirits), *Knia Maksu* in June (to signalise that the time is ripe to sow the seeds in the field), *Knia Kupli* and *Umtisong* with prayers to the Kupli (water deity) for a good return of crops in June. In July, *Knia Pyrdong Shonong* and *Knia Khlam* are observed with prayers to the deities for protection from the onslaught of epidemics.

In the same month, *Knia Pyrthat* is held, to appease the thunder spirit. *Knia Thang Bula* held in November, corresponds to a harvest rite.

*Megaliths* — are closely associated with funeral ceremonies. Megaliths are no longer erected, the rites relating to their erection having been forgotten by people and those remains which are scattered all over the country were left by our forefathers. Megalithic erections are common in important market places. These megaliths, I mean the menhirs, are associated with dolmens; the former represent the male progenitors, the latter the female. The people also employ several cairns (square in shape) for keeping the remains of their dead.

Stone monuments were also raised to heroes and warrior chiefs. Some slabs and table stones are used as ceremonial seats for local chiefs during religious celebrations or Durbar sessions. In a few places, stones are associated with investiture ceremonies of a newly elected chief. Stone, a few decades back, was also used as a judgement seat on which occasions, a chief seated on it, pronounced final judicial sentence. A stone is further used as a *Mawshongthait* (resting place) in the markets.

The stone erections and remains at Nartiang in the Jaintia Hills, in the form of monoliths, table stones, basins, dissoliths and other stone works which are arranged in regular rows, are very striking and stir the imagination and wonder of a new visitor. All large stones and monoliths were hewed from large boulders. Nartiang stonehenge has an infinite variety. The extraction and carving of monoliths from boulders, their transport and erection would appear to be quite a herculean task to a modern man. But the ancients had their own technical means of keeping a large monolith permanently established. Stone erections must have involved a great degree of engineering dexterity.<sup>1</sup>

Sculpture of various patterns abounds. Human and animal figures and human foot-prints inscribed on stones, rock carvings and other designs abound in the Jaintia Hills. The Jaintia stone bridges are impressive. A Thlu Muwi bridge is a

1. One upright in Nartiang measures 28 feet long. The stone which forms a megalithic bridge is 23 feet in the same direction at Nartiang.

joint of 3 gigantic spans; the Umiaknieh bridge, with stone supports, is held out by iron rods and the Syndai bridge is fanned out with wonderful stone arches. Khasi stone monuments in Jaintiapur, cairns, menhirs and slabs still stand, and other stone remains in the form of menhirs and dolmens are seen in Silchang, Nowgong District.

### House models

An indigenous house pattern is oval-shaped. This pattern generally has timber as uprights, posts, and pillars, cross beams, rafters, etc. Some houses are stilt, the floors being lined up with timber, also used for fencing. Houses of bamboo are rare in the uplands but prevalent on the north, south and west. The house has the following compartments. The first in *Ka Kyndur* used as a porch where agricultural and other implements are kept. *Ka Nympei* is a family hall which floor is levelled with stones or planks and reached from the porch by a staircase. It serves multifarious purposes—cooking, eating, sitting and is congested with household articles. On its centre, there is a hearth with three stones. On the two sides of *Nympei*, there are four small apartments called *Kyrdein* and *Ing Kyndong*, the two apartments by the same name facing each other, in which one of *Kyrdeins* serve as store room of water and the other as barn where crops are placed. The two *Ing Kyndongs* are sleeping apartments. Behind the hall, another room called *Rympei* is provided as another sleeping place. *Kyndur* or *shyngkup* on the front lies side way of the main door into the house or it is a porch through which the house is entered. Fire-wood is kept in it. *Ka rympei* means hearth in which the house-hold members are gathered round at night to hear citations of stories and singings with *Ka duitar* or *sing diengphong* as musical instruments from the veterans.

Walls are either of planks or stone, or the lower half with stones while the upper with wood, a feature noticeable at rainy places. The roof is thatched. The eaves of grass are lowered down the sides of the walls and sometimes loop down to reach the ground. Bhoi houses on the north are mostly made of bamboo; the roof is thatched and the house is a pile dwelling with a platform and balcony but designs differ from place to

place. So also in the War areas, some houses are mechang raised with a balcony. This is due to the climatic and malarial conditions.

Khasis use certain wares for cooking, some having artistic designs on the surface. Brass utensils and copper pots are also used. Wooden dishes are no longer current although in the past they were prevalent. Bamboo containers are many. They are mainly used for storing water and other valuables. Copper lime-pots were also used. They have cane and wooden stools.

Palaces are large buildings. The roof is thatched, the walls of stone and planks and floorings of timber. There are many apartments somewhat more colossal than the ordinary. The shlur in the centre is large in which sacrifices and prayers are offered. The posts are sacred, erected by various units with religious performance. The threshold is a pavement in which religious dances are held.

### Dress and ornaments

A skirt is used for women called *jympien* which is either a cotton or endi type over which an apron (*Kyrshah*) is suspended from the left shoulder and loops down to the legs. In outdoor use, however, a *jainsem* is applied suspended from over both the shoulders and looping down below the knee. A head cover is *tapmoh* the upper ends of which keeps the head enfolds and the two end fastened behind the neck and from the neck, it loops below to cover the upper part of the body. A mantle is draped from over the shoulders, its two ends being tightened at the chest. It covers the lower end of the *tapmoh* and hangs down to the knee. There may be an inner garment worn beneath the *kyrshah* which is a loose sort of shirting. The dress differs from place to place and those whose climate is warmer use loose garments. In Shella the *jainsem* is not suspended from over the shoulders but it is used as a baldric towered from over the shoulders to stretch sideways below. Pnars rarely use *Jainkup* except on occasions.

Among men's dress, a sleeveless coat was worn until the close of the last century, a cotton cloth of thick texture having a fringe below. A waist girdle of cotton was worn beneath. Over the sleeveless coat *jymphong*, a wrapper (silk or errandi product) was suspended. Later on a dhoti (silk or cotton) was

replaced for the waist girdle. A triangular cap and a woollen head gear were worn. Ordinary men wear mostly cotton clothes while Syiems and other dignitaries prefer silk patterns.

Dancing costume comprise the following :—

**Female**

- (1) *Kyrshah dhara* or *Nara*—a valuable iainsem pattern tied from both ends of the shoulder and looping down to reach down and cover the knee.
- (2) *Mukmor*—a velvet cloth of fine texture which covers the sleeves.
- (3) *Jainpien*—a sort of loongi tied from the waist and loops downward, its upper end being covered with jainsem while its lower ends are visible.
- (4) *Coronet*—*Ka pansngiat*—a crown in pure gold or silver with a flattened top which varies in shape between oval and round.
- (5) *Wahdong*—round earrings of pure gold which are like chains, the top-most ends converging with the upper portions of the ear.
- (6) *'Siar kynthai*—earrings bedecked in the ear-lobes and looping down. It must be of pure gold.
- (7) *Lakrydeng*—for ear-lobes, of gold.
- (8) *Ki tad ki mahu*—wristlets of gold.
- (9) *Khadu syngkha*—bracelets of gold, very thick and heavy.
- (10) *Shan ryndang*—necklace of gold tightened at the neck.
- (11) *Kynjri tabah*—bands of silver worn down from the neck.
- (12) *Kanupad*—coral beads and water pearls of reddish radiance but half of them being modelled in pure gold.

### Male

- (1) *Pagri*—a multifarious coloured red and yellow turban of pure silk.
- (2) Sleeveless coat for the body.
- (3) *Bor Khor* or *Khaila*—silk dhoti with multifarious colours or plain silk dhoti for boh khaila.
- (4) *Kyniri*—silver chains.
- (5) *Coral beads*—half of which in the band are of pure gold.
- (6) Wristlets in pure gold.
- (7) '*Siar shynrang*—earrings of gold to distinguish from siar kynthei of women.
- (8) A sword belt and scabbard in pure or plaited of silver on which the sword is hung.
- (9) *Quiver*—of silver on which three or four arrows are placed.

Weapons used in dancing comprise the sheath, arrows, a bow and a quiver while spears are not used in dancing. Over their turbans, they keep a *laputa*, a band of birds' feathers. In group dance, men dance holding a sword and a *thuia* or fly-flap but in war dance, the shield substitutes the *thuia*.

### Sports and Games

The original sports comprised high jumps, long jumps, wrestling, butting, sword throw, javelin and archery. Archery is not the only surviving but the most prevalent, played as weekly matches among local teams. Modern sports such as hopscotch, skipping, football, badminton, boxing, etc., have replaced most of the genuine ones. Hunting and fishing are the lively sports which engage people as recreational activities in the town and countryside. Fishing with reels has become widespread at many rivers. At the Uiam dam site, fishing competitions are held now and then in which hundreds of persons participate, and prizes awarded to the best fishermen and women for the largest and heaviest trophy. Catching of fish by using nets (made of fibres and soft tar) is of various kinds.

Building of weirs across the streams is common at many places. Fishing by use of hooks with a bait is largely prevalent. There are many kinds of rods and hooks used at fishing trips.

Community hunting of a game still survives in which the game, tiger or leopard, is picquet at a jungle it has haunted in which at the fringes of the jungle, during the chase, a large number of persons lie in wait and provoke the animal by shouting at, beating their drums and once the animal's approach is seen, veterans in groups, charge forth and drive it into an open part of the grove using various means of stratagem. The game having been injured, it is thus finally directed into a dug-out pit. The animal having sunk down into its abyss, men quickly fill the mouth of the trench with fire-wood, combustible substances and other dried turfs and set fire to them. The tiger gradually dies by being burnt alive. Children and women join in producing noises while men charge at it. The game is not shot at but killed by being burnt alive. Veterans armed with bows, arrows and muskets however are ready to deal with to prevent it from hurting any one.

Fishes are also caught alive. This is possible in river beds lined up with pebbles in which men and women lift up the stones and pebbles and lay hold by bare hands on fishes stuck at them. The fish if not caught quickly may escape and slip into the water. In most cases the catch is successful. Community fishing also exists in which at the middle of the river in the running current, a triangular net is placed and off it to the bank. alignment with ferns, reeds and long grass tied properly are built which together with the net in the centre obstruct fishes from bounding over. From opposite the net say 50 feet distance, men, women and children crawl through the water, dip deep and convulse the bed with the ferns, reeds tied in bundles from their hands, and charge on to the net in which, finally fishes forcibly dragged into, are enmeshed at the net. The persons see that fishes have no chance to escape by carefully covering the river bed.

Now-a-days *shikari* with the use of fire-arms and ammunitions is more prevalent. Ankling, hiking, swimming, diving, boxing, rock climbing, horse riding, plucking of wild flowers and picnics generally feature as recreational and creative activities. Birds, pigeons, jungle fowls are not only hunted but also



trapped by various means. In some cases, a cohesive gum with a bait is used at shrubs where birds perching on wild fruit trees are just trapped to the gum. Traps made of cane and bamboo are also indigenous type of catching birds. Now-a-days, music and dance are the recreative pursuits.

### Food and Drinks

Meats relished are pork, beef, so fowls and fish are relished. Meat boiled with or without vegetables furnish good soup dishes. Smoked, broiled and dried meat and fish are taken. Nartiang Jaintias do not take beef. Fish is prepared by boiling, frying, baking, drying and smoking. But fish dried in red-hot stones (*Kha Kynthah maw*) towards the west or baked near a chimney by piercing the fish lengthwise and holding it with a stick are the favourite indigenous items. In winter time everywhere fish is basked in the sun to make it preservable for a long time. Now frying of meat and fish with oils, onion, ginger, garlics, pepper, turmeric is very common. These things as well as *tez pat* are abundant and available locally. They prepare fried rice with pork and chicken called *ja-doh* which is different from *ja-snam*, rice cooked with blood of pigs and fowls. The real delicacy is a pig's head which in the first instance is thoroughly boiled, the brain and the tongue portion being boiled separately having them wrapped in a leaf. The meat ready is rendered into fine cuts, when the tiny fractions are besmeared with tongue and brain and proportionately mixed with cuts from onion, ginger, chillies and salt. The boiled water inhaled from the meat serves as gravy. Meat of wild animals relished extends to wild pigs, some horned animals, pigeons, jungle fowls and rhinos but does not include snakes, frogs, tigers, bears, monkeys, elephants, etc.

Dried fish is prepared by various ways. They take a boiled dried fish with potato or wild herbs; it is as well fried with spices or without them: a smoked one rendered into a paste with onion, ginger and chillies serves as a pickle. However, it is prepared into various dishes according to one's choice.

Condiments from seeds (called *nei lieh*) are quite tasty. The seeds are baked and then ground and powdered with little salt. *Turungbai*, a paste prepared from the beans melted specially and then fried with onion, ginger, pepper, dhonias seeds and cinnamum, is very much relished as a condiment.

Rice cakes are many in which a different type of paddy is planted for rice cakes. The common cakes are *pu jer*, *pu syep*, *pu doh*, *pu maloi*, *pu nei*, *pu khlein*, *pu niang hali*, *pu saw*, *pu tyndong*, *pu lum*, etc. *Pu jer* is a fine powdered rice eaten at the important ceremonies such as wedding, naming, etc. In all the stages of preparation for these different rice cakes, rice has first to be pounded. In case of *pu tharo*, the cake has first to be modelled by a *Sarow*, an earthen dish and then baked. In case of *pu syep*, the rice pounded minutely is strained, then wrapped in a piece of cloth and boiled, but the lid of the ware has pores through which the steam is discharged. In the preparation of *pu saw*, a little bit of soda and baking powder is added, otherwise the preparation is not so different from that of *pu tharo*. *Pu doh* is like a pork patty, well baked. *Pu maloi* is very much like *idli* common in southern India. *Pu nei* is added with local jhiras and fried which may be called Khasi namki but not so dry as the latter. In preparing *pu khlein*, powdered rice with little water and molasses mixed is fried. *Pu niang hali* is something like a Jaintia fried biscuit (salted). *Pu tyndong* is a moistened grounded rice packed inside a *chungnga* (bamboo tube) and baked over a fire. *Pu lum* is a plain rice cake like *pu maloi* but drier than the latter. In preparing them all, powdered rice is carefully strained in the process and a refined paste only is used. They prepare various fruit salads by mixing sour and sweet fruits with proportionate quantities of leaf mustard and leaf of arum plant specially planted with salt and chillies either green or pounded.

*Iad um*, a common beer, is brewed from rice mainly but sometimes a leguminous plant or millet or maize is used. The preparation consists of a fermentation process in which yeast is applied into a rice boiled portion; in the case of *iad hiar* it is twice boiled but in the case of *iad um*, it is boiled only once. Beer is important at ceremonies and sacrifices. It is refreshing and vitalising. But drinking and drunkenness have definitely spoiled the moral character of many young persons while, in the past, it was taken with restrictions.

### Dance

Dance is held at an open ground or premises of royal houses and public places. In a group dance, women confined to the inner dancing court, dance in small groups featured with

crawling of toes and the balanced movement of the body in which the hands are hardly moved in and out. They dance with steadfast gesture and countenance. Male dancers dance in groups at the outer court around the women; they dance with a fly-flap in their hand, the dance being featured with stepping up forward and backward, and occasional hopping in accompaniments of pipings and drummings played from an orchestra on a stage. The dancing ground furnishes a sea of apparels and ornaments in gold and silver, the brilliant radiance of crowns which women wear being largely symbolic, shining forth with their resplendent dresses. Women dancers are all virgins.

A sword dance is a typical combat dance in which males only participate holding a sword and a shield and showing signs as if they were assaulting, thrusting and duelling. A *mastieh* in which male dancers use a sword and fly-flap consists of stepping forward and receding, starting three steps forward, then bowing down their heads and dropping down their swords and fly-flaps, then receding and the process is repeated. Dancers in groups face each other charging forward and receding in the above style.

One of the fertility dances is *Longhai* in which both men and women stand face to face in two groups, in one hand they hold a hoe. The dancing consists of descending a hoe to the ground with one hand and raising it up with another in alternate succession with melody hummed and music played at the background.

In a Jaintia dance *Laho*, a woman dances with two men one on her left and one on her right crossing hand with them over the shoulders giving expression to the movement of the body and stepping up and down. Shad lukhimai in Bhoi is like Jaintia Laho. All groups of people, Bhoi, Jaintia, War and Khasi have *mastieh* and *shad wait* as war dances.

## Music

The musical instruments consist of harps, drums and pipes. Harps or lutes are the *Duitara*, *Maryngod*, *Marinthing* and *Saron*. Drums are *Sing Diengphong* (made of cane), *Nakra* a kettle drum made of wood having the head covered with deer-skin, *Padiah*, made of wood, *Katasa* which is a circular

drum, the handle of which is made of wood, and *Sing Nalai*, a small drum. Pipes are the *Sharati*, (bamboo, pipe) and *Besli* also another kind of flute is made of bamboo. There are also trumpets made of copper called *Turci*. The Jew's harp (*Mieng*) is also widely used.

The Khasis consider *Ka Duitara* (harp) as the queen of music for its high flown and inspired melodious tunes. To the accompaniment of its tunes, a minstrel displays eloquent expressions and poetical citations such as proverbs, lamentations and parables. As such the Duitara has made contributions not only in the field of music but also gives sober expression to Khasi poetic thoughts and sentiments.

The Khasis have a number of dirges. For expressing sorrowful contemplations, they use a *Sharati* called a pipe for mourning. This pipe is more frequently used on occasions of the passing away of renowned or influential persons and accompanies dirges sung by mourners. Big drums are used at festivals, the sitting of councils, public demonstration and ceremonial reception of chiefs. The *Besli* is cowherd's pipe. The *Tangmuri* (a wooden pipe) which has a deep penetrating note is used on occasions of dancings. The *Turoi* a trumpet, served as warning to a village to get ready against the invasion of the enemy.

Western music has become popular in Meghalaya in tunes and songs with rhythms and accents derived from the original. It is worthy of note that the *Fentones* (Khasi group) recently (August 1971) has won the first prize in the All-India Beat Contest held in Bombay organised by the Wills Bristol Company. There are other pop bands. However, blind imitation, if it does not connote innovative flair, amongst the masses, might, on the other hand, retard the growth of true music-iological discipline and learning of true art. There are persons, of course, who appreciate the true art of music and sing and play of staff and solfa notations. But cheap imitation has also its place.

In respect of the indigenous Khasi dance and music, the phases of drummings and pipings in several transitions of the different arts for connotative dances, reveal the great traditions of music and the cultural heritage, as those which are played during the five day long Khyrim festival held annually at Smit. The State moreover has some of the finest traditions of Khasi

thought and culture. In other areas, dances and music are still true to life.

Current Khasi music falls into the following divisions:—

- (1) Fertility songs with actions in which pipes and drums are used, conforming to fertility celebrations;
- (2) Vocal solo in which the *duitara* is used, the harpist citing stories or parables to the accompaniment of its notes,
- (3) Debates in which two or three minstrels sing and play on their respective duitaras, citing, reciting and arguing on the tune of duitara;
- (4) *Phawar*, citation of couplets with a choral humming;
- (5) Dancing troupes in which loud piping and drummings from over the musical stage are resounded during the performance of folk dances;
- (6) Anthems with drums during the public processions and meetings;
- (7) Criers—making announcements to the village in accompaniment of drum beats;
- (8) Musical interludes with pipes and drums during the prayers and acts of worship at the festivals;
- (9) Cowherds' pipes with *Ka besli* and *Ka mieng* played by the pastoral community;
- (10) Lamentations—common in the Khasi folk-lore, conveyed in musical terms.

Drums and pipes used in public celebrations which boomings indicate the pitch of something enthusiastic for the public cause. Drums made of cane are used for more solemn tones in the domestic circle.

Modern songs are sung and melodies hummed with guitars and other string instruments independently or in combination with indigenous instruments such as small drums or duitara whatever it concerns and according to the phase of the song.

In the radio, more of the western instruments are heard played with Khasi songs and so with the Garo. Most of the tunes are western biased although there might be eloquence in words. So also Jaintia has mixed up traits sometimes of western and sometimes Indian. Comparatively, indigenous tunes have not developed to any appreciable extent. But there are persons and groups who are concerned with reviving them.

### Economic

Crops include cereals, cash crops, fruits and vegetables. The cropping pattern varies from place to place according to altitude, climate and soil. Permanent cultivation is more prevalent than slash-and-burn, the latter being confined more in Viate, Vaiphe, Mikir, Bhoi and the Lyngngam areas located in the more difficult terrain. Paddy cultivation applies to flat lands but terraces are always seen stretching over low level grounds at the base of the hills. Cultivators at places use plough animals, the paddy fields being properly irrigated after a proper drainage system. Some use transplantation system, others do not. Seeds are either sown, broadcast or just planted.

Many villages are self-sufficient in respect of rice but much of it with maize, millets, job's tears and leguminous plant are brewed into beers. At Shella, paddy is admixed at cultivation with millets. In the uplands, maize is grown admixed with potato. Maize, millet and job's tears are minor cereals. Yam and sweet potatoes are small-scale produce. Potato thrives well being exported outside in large quantities. Nong-Khlaw and neighbouring uplands are renowned for the best type of potato.

Cash crops which command market are tez leaf, pepper,, areca-nuts, betel-vines, turmeric, pepper, ginger, rubber, cotton lac and others. The south produces tez pat in lakhs of maunds annually. The south holds the monopoly in areca-nuts, turmeric, betel-vines, pepper, etc. Areca-nut is obtained by transplanting the plant from nurseries and when they have grown up, the trees yield fruits for a number of years. After plucking, the nuts are heaped inside the small ponds laid out near the plantation in order that they will stand fresh in the market longer. Betel-vine is a delicate plant being grown at soft *nullahs* (drained) and requires free passage of air during its

budding. Pepper is grown from the seeds of wild pepper or from a sappling of a wild tree. Tez pat is grown from the seeds of wild tree. Turmeric and chillies in Jaintia Hills are ground and distributed all over the districts. Trade in tez pat, pepper, broomsticks, potato is handled by Marwaris; the other crops are handled by local whole-salers who reach them into the trade depots at Shillong and the plains.

The Khasi-Jaintia Hills is a land of fruits. It records the largest transactions in the orange of the mandarin type. It is a long process of cultivation. It is transplanted three times from the first and second nursery into the parmanent cultivation. The best type is from the south but even the Jaintia and the northern variety finds much demand while on the northern Bhoi area, the tree does not stand long. Guava grows wild on the river banks but some are regularly planted which does not require much care. Lichi is a valuable product from both the north and the south. The tree requires good care. Pine-apple is plentiful. It is delicate and requires constant care and protection from destruction of the pest. A bulk is grown on the south but the cultivation has extended on the north along the Shillong-Gauhati road after the plantation has recently developed by fruit planters from the southern region.<sup>1</sup> During the last pine-apples show (All-India), Meghalaya got the first prize in 1971. There is need to organize large scale marketing of all these fruits. Limes and lemons of great variety called *sohjew*, *sohmyndong*, *soh niangriang*, *soh mynngor*, *soh khyllung*, *sohbah* etc. grow well, the best type being confined in the south. Other varieties such as passons fruit (*soh brab*), pyrus Khasiana (*soh phoh Khasi*), pears with William and Fertility varieties (*Sohphoh klong*), and pyrus begeta (*soh shur*) also are found in plenty. Plums, apricots and peaches thrive well in and around Shillong. Bananas rare in other places in Assam<sup>2</sup> such as *Kait 'mon* and *Kait jrong*<sup>3</sup>, *Kait joji* (Dwarf Cabandish), *Kait Syiem* (*Cheni Champa*), have much circulation and as a rule are dearer than common cabandish available anywhere<sup>4</sup>. Cherra is a transmit station for

1. The development of Nongpoh into fruit plantation and station quite more recently bears testimony to this.

2. Perhaps in the whole of India.

3. English equivalents not available. They are indigenous.

4. They cost double or treble the price for common banana.

the superior kinds of banana largely produced in the south. The common type is prevalent to the north. Other sour and sticky fruits, cherries, black-berries, chestnuts and other uncountable numbers grow wild.

Vegetables grow well the year round. In this, the uplands and the environs of Shillong hold the monopoly. The output from other areas is small. In respect of vegetable, the coverage with its variety deserves mention. Wild vegetables used as condiments are still relished. Vegetables of great market value are cabbage, cauliflower, carrot, beet, mustard, melon, cucumber, chillies, french-beans, pumpkin, tomato, turnips, brinjals, egg-plant, squash, kholnol, letuse, gourds, radish, etc. Shillong supplies vegetables and potatoes to Gauhati and business centres at the Kamrup district in Assam and vegetables are distributed to Jowai and Cherrapunji side. Owing to the enlightened system of cultivation and the amount of care given, the vegetables, cash crops and fruits are of good quality during all their seasons. Besides, onion, garlicks and some other varieties are grown. Vegetable and fruit cultivation constitute the permanent type of cultivation. Some vegetables have two calendars in a year.

Potato, ginger and a few other crops thrive well in the so-called *Thang-Bun* in which the cultivable plot of land is turfed and sods levelled up over the area; it is converted into a turfdrain. In this simple process of cultivation, the surface soil is first hoed up in January or February and the turf is basked to sun and air. When the sods are dried up, they are burnt along with the other combustible substances. Then the ash is levelled with the soil, hued up and seeds planted. This system, although rare in neighbouring areas, is indigenous in Khasi Hills. Sometimes mixed cropping of paddy and potato or potato and ginger or individual crop thrives on this system. However, in case paddy is grown simultaneously with potato, by this manner, the former is planted on the fringes of field. This is not shift-and-burn but may be described as a model of permanent cultivation. The other models of permanent cultivation comprise paddy, fruit, potato, tez-pat, areca-nuts, etc. *Thang Bun* is discernible from *jhum* which has deleterious effect upon the soil.

Many of the ancient cottage industries still survive. Of them weaving and sericulture are practised in the interior of the



Jaintia and northern Bhoi Hills which produce indigenous garments, loongis, aprons etc. On the Khasi uplands, in and around Shillong and the neighbouring townships, women are occupied mostly with trade and cultivation mainly, although a section cater with opening tea-stalls and supplying meals and other items including indigenous rice cakes. Educated ladies are occupied in offices, schools, hospitals and other vocations. Handloom in Jaintia is associated with rearing of endi cocoons fed on mulberry trees. They are fed also with a special fodder, the covers of cocoons being boiled in utensils called *Kho sla khar*. In Jaintia uplands women in Summer, Shangpung, Saipung, Mynso and Umpanai, Um Mynso, Bhoi Lalu, Bhoi Khyrwang, Bhos Ksi are all engaged in weaving. The monopoly in this however, as also held by Nongtungs and Khyrwangs in the Jaintia Hills. Some of these people gin and weave cotton locally. At places cotton grows wild. From cane and bamboo, they turn out several cones, baskets, mats, trays, rain and sun shades and other articles. In the southern area, elongated baskets of wicker work covered with slips are made in which fruits and other produce are packed. They look like cotton baskets of the Garos but not so tall. Mining of coal, limestone, excavation, timber extraction have been undertaken at many places. A large number of pigs, cattle, poultry, horses, mules, ponies, goats and poultry is domesticated. Cattle, pigs and poultry are common everywhere but goats, horses and ponies are localised in certain areas only. Now cattle and pigs have been largely brought from the Assam plains and Garo Hills (in case of pigs) to supplement meat markets in the capital. Some places in the highlands form excellent pastoral grounds. Hooker in 1856 compared the pastures of Mairang to those of New Zealand. The Khasis are known to be pastoral people with large herds of cattle, ponies, goats, chickens domesticated in many villages. Besides the cattle, Hooker found Khasicoal (at that time excavated in small quantities) to be of an excellent quality because it produced little ash. In short, Khasi fruits and vegetables are the best and capture various markets. The Khasi and Jaintia Hills have potential resources for industrialisation. Besides, deposits of minerals such as coal, limestone, sillimanite, mica and even oil and other precious metals are found. There are promises too for multifarious chemical industries based on immense forest resources. Fruit canning and manufacture of jams will be a useful development. Drugs and medicines can profitably be manufactured out of the profuse herbs and rich flora.

Though iron-smelting has now died out there still survives a number of local smithies which forge and manufacture the imported iron into implements such as hammers, daos, axes, pincers, knives,<sup>1</sup> locks and keys, jumpers, sickles, spades and arrow heads, hearth supports for local use. These give good service and are enduring.

The earliest British officials were impressed with a peculiar kind of iron-smelting that was practised in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. The Khasis even made their own indigenous guns and fire-arms (including muzzle-loading guns and flint-lock muskets) used in the past in the field of battle and developed a rudimentary form of science. Explosives and bullets were also manufactured locally. It is said that gun-powder was made out of saltpetre, sulphur and charcoal. Some home-made guns were peculiar in both their appearance and in the way in which they were fired. Such fire-arms were used till the Anglo-Khasi war (1829-33) and the final Anglo-Jaintia war (1863).

Tradition tells us that products of the Khasi highland-fruits such as oranges, limes and lemons, pine-apples, papaya and others, metals such as steel, copper, cash crops such as cotton, rubber, pepper, tez pat, betel-leaf, areca-nuts, plantains and turmeric and other materials like leather and ivory found large markets in Assam and Surma Valleys.

### **Social Change**

Khasi society has greatly been transformed by many changes which have taken place in recent times although it is more evolutionary. It started with the entry of the British and annexation first of the Khasis Hills (in 1833) and then of the Jaintia Hills (in 1835). The Freedom-struggle collapsed with the fall of U Tirot Singh who was captured and exiled by the East India Company to Dacca in 1833 where he died about 1840. In 1835 the Company annexed the Jaintia Hills after putting down the first Jaintia insurrection. Yet the Jaintias repeated and renewed their attempts at revolt. In 1860, with the imposition of a house tax by Government, the Jaintias again raised the standard of rebellion but it was soon suppressed. The final revolt took place in 1861 and the Pnars persisted in that struggle for 2 years. The Jaintia leader was U Kiang Nongbah. Through treachery,

1. A few with shutters plaited with horns and many with wood.

U Kiang Nongbah was captured in December 1862 and executed at the Jowai market on the 30th of that month. Many Dolois and warriors of the Jaintia Hills perished. Yet the Pnars (Jaintias) during this National Movement had created widespread difficulties to the Government. The annexation of these Hills broke down the age-long isolation of the Khasis and Pnars and brought about far-reaching changes.

Syiems, Myntris, Lyngdohs and Wahdadars as titles of monarchs or more minor State chiefs were retained by the Government, and Khasi States were assigned the Independent or Semi-Independent status in the treaties concluded. Besides a few villages in Khasi Hills along with the entire area of the present Jaintia Hills District were treated as Non-States (or British Areas). Sohra (Cherrapunji) was the first headquarters of administration but in 1864 it was transferred to Shillong (owing to heavy rainfall experienced at Cherra). Later on Shillong became a regimental station, and in 1874 was made the capital of Assam.

Western education was brought first by the Welsh-Calvinistic Presbyterian Mission which reduced the language to writing in the Roman alphabet. Several publications in Khasi came out<sup>1</sup> and the Khasi version of the Bible also was published in the last century. After 50 years or so came the catholic missions to educate the people. The Khasis took themselves quickly to western education. Many scholars, writers and learned men came out. According to the erstwhile census reports, Khasi women took the lead in female literacy. A distinguished lady, the late Miss Mavis Dunn Lyngdoh, was the first woman Minister in Assam in the Saadullah-Coalition Ministry and probably one of the first woman Ministers in the whole of India.

Adaptation to the western life was quickly made although the matrilineal laws of inheritance and succession and the other cultural traits were retained. Archery still ranks as a community game. Khasi music and songs are still heard and dancing festivals just like Garo are still held. But this transition also records loss of the other features. Substantial gains reaped

1. For literature, see H. Bareh, *A Short History of Khasi Literature* (2nd Edition, 1969).

from modernity, however, are perceptible in the field of literature, administration and Government service.

Social change is more phenomenal among the Khasi and Jaintia than their neighbouring and far-flung tribes. They were the first to come into regular contact with the British Government. The consolidation of the territory was over until 1863 which synchronised with the establishment of the Jowai Sub-Division. The change gathered more momentum from 1874 when Shillong became the capital of the erst while province of Assam. In this connection, the retrospective effects from the process of urbanisation, spread of Christianity, administrative orientation, emergence of new trade structures, role of new social contacts all culminate in causing a social transformation. The change has to be interpreted in terms of 19th century, modern and contemporary.

The change has its impact made into various spheres of social life and culture. This is also due to the exposure of the society to contacts from outside. While the change was innovative in certain respects, it had killed some of the ancient incentives and industries. For instance, with the coming of the British administration, iron-smelting on which thousands of families gained their livelihood received a death-blow, and with it were gone the skills and large out-turns in goods and implements of various kinds. The loss, however, has partially been compensated by the gains we get from the plantation of temperate fruits, potato and vegetables. Weaving has diminished in many places. The loss in dexterity and skills in other ancient trades needs mention in which people became largely deprived of the athletic character and constant exercise of their limbs which, however, went together with the increase of comforts. The other ancient enterprises such as gold washing, excavation of copper, silver and precious metals went to extinction. Similarly the value of local ceramics, wood and bamboo arts and crafts, furnitures has diminished with the coming in of cooking utensils, vessels, cups, mugs, jugs, bowls, trays as well as umbrellas, rain coats, sun hats, carpets, dressing tables, purdahs, curtains, and modern luxuries. The traditional patterns, however, still survive. Elsewhere we find people using a *Knup*, a rain-proof cover (made from cane and leaf). Traditional headdress is no longer prevalent. For instance a majority of the people now prefer modern combs to indigenous ones of

cane. Similarly the preference to modern textile goods and fabrics has resulted in the decrease of weaving works and use of indigenous patterns of dress.

Change in house models has largely become noticeable in the towns, township and advanced villages which largely results from the widespread new building incentives. Stories are told how this mechanical skill has caused abandonment of important traditional carpenter's tools and instruments connected with masonry, iron-smelting and stone raising and it brought about the use of modern tools and equipments. Thus hundreds of modern types of houses had not only been constructed but the techniques were quickly spread into the nearby villages from Shillong. A good deal of building materials are available locally such as lime (*shan kpu*), sawn timber and planks, reeds, gravels and stones which are all good for construction and building works. So houses with stilt, lime-washed walls, corrugated iron for roofs replaced the old houses built of wood, stone and plank, and thatched with straw.<sup>1</sup> Some persons combine traditional and modern models. The people learnt about decent living and kept their houses neat and clean. The people have learnt to arrange better shops in sheds and buildings. And yet at many interior places, we still come across with indigenous houses which still exhibit old traits and in which the present transformation seems to have little impact.

In respect of dress, we notice considerable changes. Females still retain their traditional mode of dress in degree varying from place to place but the use of indigenous woven and dyed materials has declined. Synthetic materials such as nylon, silk, cotton, etc., from Indian mills and abroad are used for patterns of their dress. Males in large numbers have abandoned their traditional dress and have adopted modern dress altogether. Very rarely males who put on their traditional dress are come by except on occasions of dance, festivals and ceremonies. At festivals we see dancers and priests who put on their expensive costume and ornaments and in their very originality.

1. For stilt stone is largely used while reeds (*Kdait*) and lime are used for wall structures. At Cherrapunji, all house-holds, even with roofs thatched, have chimneys with coal available locally used. Coal is supplied to Shillong from Lang Kyrdom, Laitryngew and Jowai.

Christianity<sup>1</sup> accounts for considerable changes. Christians have departed from their former religious ceremonies and rituals in accepting Christian teaching but while Christianity has obliterated megalithic erections, priesthood, household and religious celebrations inside its own circle, it has not yet materially changed the laws of inheritance, traditional polity and land tenure. Christians retain the character of their race and have not lost the identity far from being a matter of subversion. Christianity no doubt has caused reversals in marriages, naming, funeral, house building and village ceremonies in such spheres as it applies connoting abandonment of the old religious faith and belief. Other intrinsic things remain to be seen in other laws of inheritance and succession to offices, institutions, arts, dance, songs, proverbs, folk-lore, sports, games and other items of cultural heritage which still survive.

Socio-economic and politico-cultural systems are greatly integrated into the age old matrilineal laws of succession which apply both to Christian and non-Christian States. Many of the Syiems (Rajahs) in Khasi Hills are returned to their office on the hereditary basis from the royal families and so other nobles who represent the hereditary noble clans. Yet in the Christian States, the old State religion receives official recognition in the performance of important rituals by a handful of priests whereas in non-Christian States, the performance of the religious rites attains solid attention. In the Hills, many Dalois are non-Christian but in one or two Christian Daloiships, there is a priest who conducts the old sacerdotal affairs of the elakaship. The traditional pattern of polity goes side by side with modern systems in which members of the Parliament, Legislative Assembly, District Council and Municipality are returned on modern universal adults' suffrage without any consideration to the hereditary basis. In fact modern institutions contain more elite than the traditional State and Elaka form of polity. In non-Christian areas, the old religious rituals are still obtained. However, owing to the complex change affecting the whole country, there may have been diversifications in the practice and observance of religious rites which may have been more superficially done than in the decades gone in which consideration, the working out of a system of orientation is necessary.

1. In its various forms—Catholic, Presbyterian, Anglican, secessionist and other denominations. More than half of the population in the two Districts—Khasi Hills and Jaintia Hills—is Christian.

Education lays impetus to social transformation. True, both administration and education played a vital role in eradicating ill-fated practices and customs such as sorcery, human sacrifice, superstitious beliefs in tribal areas.

When Cherrapunji, the first British station, ceased to be the District Headquarters, Shillong grew into a capital of Assam. The society had to adjust to intensive contacts to which it was exposed. There was no inner Line Regulation. The social change upto 1863 was localised in a small sphere and met with small response. 1864 which coincided with the beginnings of Shillong as the capital, the collapse of Jaintia movement and the growth of the Jowai sub-division facilitated smooth running of the British administration and enabled the Christian Mission to establish its work on a proper footing. The people, taken to the stress and strains of this upheaval, sought to redress their loss by gains from education. They took to alphabet, set up a number of schools and brought about the emergence of an intelligentsia which sought to express itself for research and rediscovery.

The type of oral and traditional education imparted in the past greatly differed from the modern and contemporary. The traditional pattern laid stress on practical and all-round training in which men were acquainted with warfare, oratory, arts (singing, dancing and music), community life, council sitting, sports including hunting, swimming and mountaineering, iron-smelting, masonry, carpentry, crafts, timber cutting, stone raising and architecture, divination and sacrifices. Discipline, efficacious role, unified programme were its motto. Theoretical lessons conformed to citing of proverbs, debates, story-telling. Education was community and culture biased.

Women received austere type of training. They were custodians of religion. They brought up their children in line with community living and had various indoor and outdoor works.

Modern system of education no doubt has broken such traditional biased instructions. Other factors have played equally their role in breaking down the old isolationist tendency. The modern curriculum was devised to inculcate knowledge in various subjects and enable people at the first instance to read and write in their own alphabet. It thus played a role in integrating the elite with the rest of the country. In course of time

batch after batch of educated persons was produced who after completing their studies were diversified in various fields of social, educational and administrative service. Very few of the educated persons went back to their village home. The greatest defect was the absence of vocational schools and more the absence of culture-biased system in the educational curriculum. Today education has been described in terms of specialisation and job-orientation.

To make good the loss of cultural values, a group of learned men at the close of the last century came out who sought to reinstate culture in literature and through other means. Dr. B.K. Roy Burman says: 'they needed new inspirations and new light. In their sub-conscious, there is a continuous search for the books for new light without discarding the old vision. Thus on one hand there is search for meaning of life, on the other the search for the resurrection of the symbol'. In the 19th century the first cultural club was founded. In 1906 the Calcutta University recognised the Khasi language as a subject in the Matriculation Examination. 'The subjects covered by Khasi literature is quite impressive. There are books in philosophy, sociology, economics; there are also fictions and dramas'<sup>1</sup>. Now Khasi language has been recognised as a second language in the Gauhati University.

Convergence of these factors derived from the suppression of the armed movements, the coming in of Christianity, the spread of education and the beginnings of Shillong was truly epoch-making. Since then there was decline in iron-smelting, monolithic erections and other herculean jobs. New tendencies had emerged. Women took more liberty moving in and out of the villages as wars and fightings had ceased. Probably by then the power of the avuncular males had become much distorted. Shifts from villages into Shillong grew as new features. Shillong having become a trade entrepot attracting rings of traders from all nooks and corners who came in full head-loads moving with astonishing speed to cover the distance. The ties of integration in turn became more strengthened. Now a contrast is furnished as teams of traders come to Shillong by jeeps, buses and other means of transport. New games were

2. B.K. Roy Burman, Chairman's remarks—*Lecture on Tribal Languages of North-Eastern India*, New Delhi, Dec. 12, 1972.



developed. Archery, a game of skill than of strength, continues and traditional traits grow side by side with the modern.

Modern dietary supplements indigenous ones; European and Indian sweets and cakes, other groceries, spices, snacks have largely been adopted. Tea has replaced beer. There are tea stalls and restaurants where indigenous cakes and meals are catered. *Kwai* is still consumed largely not only as means of entertainment but as a socially cultivated habit.

The fascination which western music has developed is astonishing. Western songs and musical instruments seem to have natural spontaneity in which young persons quickly imitate them. Yet Khasi musicologists and composers have made immense contributions recently in their efforts to enrich the original tunes. In the circle of church choirs, we find instances where village people knew tonic solfa notion better than town people.

The Khasis have developed more mechanical dexterity recently. Motor workshops, electrical workshops, bone meal, stone crushing, timber industry, have become important owing to the recent increase in vehicles and electrical works. Bakeries, sweets, fruit canning, soap and candle works are the new phases in the industrial development. Mechanised farming recently started is gradually increasing.

Social contacts, colonial tendencies, caste structure have mixed results. Christian teachings, indigenous proverbial maxims and religious instructions exhort keeping alive of values such as humility, charity, egalitarian concept, and other virtues which both the elite and the mass should cultivate. If the society, on the other hand, is featured with vice such as jealousy, position feeling, status consciousness, rivalry, there would be an irreparable loss of talents and social incentives which in turn help the growth of individualism, communal tendency, social superiority, factional rivalries which distort the society and hamper its collective growth. Social change is a study which provides changes not only at social and cultural stratas but also taste, temperament and values. It applies not only to people in Meghalaya but offers scope for study at the different levels of social relationships and human character.

## Chapter 4

### POLITY

#### Garos

Village polity centred round the Nokmas. The person of a Nokma in the past was considered sacred; he was virtually autocratic and wielded power in the village community. Yet in practice he was not all powerful. In performing religious duties, he was advised by the priests; in other emergency cases, he was bound to abide by the advice of clansmen. There were other limitations and restraints imposed by customary laws. We have several stories told that people rose against despotic Nokmas and deposed them. In the past, at their confederations Nokmas used to meet on their council sittings and resolved upon certain issues. Their decisions were conveyed to the people who held final and ultimate power to approve or veto them. Nokmas were supposed to be persons of great talents possessed with the sterling qualities of head and heart. The definition given by Rongmuthu on the functions of the Nokmas is embracing. He observes the title has seven meanings :<sup>1</sup>

(1) *A. King Nokma*—one who keeps the A. king land of his village on behalf of the chatchi or mahari to which his wife belongs;

(2) One who is wealthy, possessing immense earthly possessions. Such a Nokma is known as *Nokdangi Nokma* or *Gamni Nokma*;

(3) One who has performed the expensive Gana ceremony. Such a Nokma is known as *Mithdeini Nokma*;

1. *Folk Tales of The Garos*, p. 392.

(4) One who is hereditary in the position of a chieftain or king. Such a Nokma is known as *Bahkapaonin Nokma*;

(5) One who is appointed a village headman by the Government so that he may help the Government officials in the discharge of their various duties within the village domain. Such a Nokma is known as *Sorkarini Nokma*;

(6) One, who for visible manifestations of qualities of head and heart in word or deed, is well known and respected both by the public in general and by the Government. Such a Nokma is known as *Chalang Nokma*;

(7) One who, for his deep erudition in the divinities, mythological lore and mysterious profundity of creation, is generally looked up to as a visible source of spiritual enlightenment by his people. Such a Nokma is called *Kamal Nokma*.

Irrespective of restriction, Nokmas no doubt had great voice in deciding the village affairs. Nokmas had attendants and followers who had respective functions for carrying out their instructions and enforcing village council's decisions. In the past these councils gave instructions for war and defence, executing administration, concerting action with the other village states, distributing lands to the residents, fixing dates of festivals and programmes, initiating pieces of legislation and looking after other welfare works. In the past the Garos broke down their village isolation and topographical confrontation by concerting some federations arranged region-wise when war and defence became imminent. Villages had trade compacts in which territorial rights were recognised among villages. The titles *A. chik* and *Mande* imply the sense of a strong unity loved and cherished dearly in the heart of every Garo man; the collective and democratic way of living have their own impressions.

The Garo council is known as *Mela Solbonga* but the arrangement of council sitting otherwise is different from Khasi. When circumstances necessitate, such a council was convened; some sittings were open-door held near a Nokpante; the venue of council was *Bandasal* especially if reference be had to its judicial character. A small meeting of Nokpante and a few elders could, however, be held inside the Nokpante where dignitaries sat down according to ranks, the Nokma presiding over the meeting. The decorum was perhaps not so advanced as

debators rose one over the other at the top of their voice or speaking simultaneously where women also joined in the deliberations. The assistants of the Nokma known to us are messengers (*Dakora*) who convened the meeting, *Sirdar* who acted as a police superintendent and *Laskar*, a judicial officer. Veterans helped guide the course of discussions so that relevant issues only were summed up and a consensus was sought to be arrived at. Now the *laskar* presides over the village council meetings.

In the past, murder was one of the most serious crimes. According to traditions, the relatives of the demised died at the hand of the murderer, took the law into their own hands and sought to kill the murderer in turn; if such acts and counter-acts of vengeance continued, they developed into clannish feuds repeated from one generation to another. In such cases, the village council would take up suitable remedial measure to heal the friction but hardly could they succeed. There used to be a third party not any way related to the disputants which sought to intervene and settle the dispute. Now the Deputy Commissioner takes up the criminal cases in the district.

Garos had various forms of swearing an oath in trial. Like Khasis the case was sometimes decided by resorting to water ordeals. In this two divers representing the disputants plunged inside the water and he who could stay longer was pronounced a winner. There was an ordeal also in which a hot-red piece of iron was put into the arm of the accused; should he escape unburnt, he was proved innocent.<sup>1</sup> So also an accused was proved righteous or guilty by a very simple process in which a chicken was tied outside the house for the night; should it live through to the next morning, the accused won his case.

Divergence from the past practice resulted from a series of changes enforced by the British administration in their earliest contact with the Garos. It dates back to around 1816-1820, when Mr. David Scott created the Nazara and Zamindari Mahals graded as tributary in which Laskars and Sordars were appointed revenue collectors from such territories and were paid remunerations for their service. The territory of the Independent Garos was consolidated finally in 1873, exactly 100

1. It resembled the ancient Jaintia form of ordeal.

years ago, and the Government had taken almost a century or so to complete the annexation and form the District. The laskarship in the hills became much more recognised shortly after the formation of the District in 1866. The position of the Nokmas in administrative concerns was largely changed and their place was taken by the Laskars. Laskars, under this arrangement, were not only revenue collectors but acted as village magistrates as well, who with their full councils decided civil and criminal cases and could fine up to Rs. 50 in accordance with the Act V of 1861 rectified by the Rules for the Administration of Police and Justice for the Garo Hills District dated March 29, 1937. The Deputy Commissioner was overall in charge and was responsible to the Commissioner of Assam and the Governor later on. Appeals lay to him from the Laskars and their village courts. The laskar received remuneration from the revenue collected on behalf of the Government, now it is the District Council. The Nokmas had been surrendering their power to give place to the Laskar.

The British Government recognised a system of indirect election of Laskars to office. It was a system in which Nokmas proposed and Government approved. It was combined also with a direct method in which members of the public of a Laskar's jurisdiction exercised the right of election.<sup>1</sup> Now the power of the appointment of the Laskars had passed to the District Council. It has provided that a full village council be reconstituted whose members be returned on both methods of election and nomination who shall elect a Laskar. While retaining a democratic outlook, matters, on the other hand, might be made difficult, if say a cleavage arises in the council with regard to the issue. The Laskar is not a village but an elaka head in the same manner as a Jaintia Daloi maintains that title. The Laskar now has been assisted by a sordar who is paid an annual grant of Rs. 100 with an official uniform. The laskar always decides cases in a council in which he sums up at the end a consensus of opinion and pronounces their decision. The Garos now decide cases by imposing a fine upon a party at fault. Always cases and decisions are confined to the Mahari in which a Laskar is not involved as arbitrant but now many of the affairs are gradually passing to the Council. Most of the changes are further dealt within the forthcoming chapters.

1. *Implanter*, Jan. 21, 1972, O.D. Shira's article.

### **Khasi and Jaintia**

Khasi polity is not village but state based. There are 25 existing states, 16 of which are known as Syiemships, 1 is Wahdadarship, 3 are Lyngdohships and 6 Sirdarships. Other Non-states (called Brithish areas in the erst-while administration) comprise 32 villages in Khasi Hills District and 20 Daloiships in Jaintia Hills District. Daloiships and Wahdadarships are like elakas owing to the bigger jurisdiction in which in each is comprised of a group of villages. Sirdars and Dalois in non-states have powers similar to those of Laskars. Syiemships during the British administration attained the Independent and Semi-Independent status. The recent abolition of privy purses did not effect the Khasi Syiemships. Some of them formed very large kingdoms in the past extending from the Brahmaputra to the Surma river in Bangladesh. The power of Khasi kings in the plains was reduced after the annexation of the Khasi-Jaintia Hills occurring from 1829 to 1839. In consequence of the annexation, two Syiemships, Jaintia and Nongwah lapsed, the latter comprising a great portion in the Kamrup district.

The Census calculated during the Independence shows the population size for the first six largest States as follows:—

(1) Myllem	65,155
(2) Khyrim	48,467
(3) Maharam	17,573
(4) Nongkhlaw	15,627
(5) Nongstoin	13,155
(6) Cherra	10,310

Among Lyngdohships, Sohiong took the largest number with 4,178 persons. Among non-states Nongpoh had a population of 2,503 persons. But in Jowai Sub-Division, Bhoi Daloi-ship came first for 15,798 followed by Jowai for 13,344 persons.

Khasi polity, owing to its peculiar characteristics deserves some emphasis. Let us treat of Syiemship first.

The Syiem is the head of the State and runs his day-to-day administration with his cabinet which functions extend to the

administration of the markets, collections of judicial fines, supervision of prisons, etc. He takes up judicial cases from various units and villages in which he acts as a judge and his council as jury according to the powers which the District Council has entrusted. The Syiem and the State Council in the past determined foreign relations.

He has limited powers. He is maintained by levies returned from some of the markets in which in some cases, the market levies are shared with his Myntris (ministers). In Jaintia Hills,<sup>1</sup> the levies were shared between him and the Dalois. Judicial fines also constitute one of his sources of income. He never acts as a feudal lord or zamindar. Other markets might have fallen under the control of local authorities. He gets income also from imposts levied on distillaries. He has no law-making power and his authority is clearly defined which extends over the departments assigned to him.

The state is known as *Hima* implying itself a sovereign body with organic and ethical unity while the people are called *Ki Khun Ki Hajar* which means children. They are exempted from paying taxes while tributary subjects are obliged to pay taxes.

Women inherit property but are not entitled to succeed to office of chieftains.<sup>2</sup> However there is a *Syiem-sad*, a mother, aunt or sister of syiem who is regarded as the custodian of state ceremonies and title-holder of crown-lands. A *Syiem-sad* is a spiritual head of the State who delegates the ruling powers to a *Syiem-ruler* either her maternal uncle, brother or son.

In a few states, a dual system of *Syiemship* was set up *i.e.*, two *Syiem* families were instituted to carry out jointly the administration of the whole State. In such a case, the two royal houses either shared in specified proportions market levies or were assigned respective portfolios and subjects. In Maharam *Syiemship*, the old arrangement was that one family furnished

1. Jowai was a sub-division in the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District until recently when it was elevated to a District (Jaintia Hills District).

2. Except on occasion's when the *Syiem* families were hard pressed with the absence of a male issue. As discussed earlier, female *syiems* in the past were great and extra-ordinary figures who built up their kingdoms with great sagacity and statesmanship.

the actual Syiem and the other, the Deputy Syiem. In Maharam and Nobosohphoh States, the two families ruling jointly are called Syiem-lich and Syiem-iong. The former are called Dholah Rajahs by the plains people while the latter are known as the Kalah Rajah. The Syiems, in these States, however, did not belong to a common origin. Market imports are shared amongst them.

At the background, it is worth noticing that the existing communes and village organisations known as Basanships, Lyngdohships and Basanships preceded Syiemship which in course of time were absorbed into the latter, when it was formed which put an end to their sovereign status. The Syiem belonged to the royal house founded in consequence of the contractual allegiance, conventions and covenants in which several village chieftains joined to form a State and delegated special powers to the royal house. Thus communes, sub-Syiemships and other units became integrated into one kingdom.

At the State level, the two most important institutions are the Electoral College and the Cabinet, but in a few states the latter performs the functions of the former. The electoral Council consists of hereditary heads of clans or heads of units, the composition of size varying from State to State. This Council is responsible for electing and crowning the Syiem with the approval of the people.<sup>1</sup> In the event, other complication arose, the Council referred the matter to the people whose decision was final. In Langrin a direct election exists in which all male adults in that state meet and elect the Syiem themselves. The Khasi States Federation at the Interim period adopted the following arrangement in matters relating to the choice of the Syiem which still persists:

- (a) "In these nine states-Cherra, Khyrim, Nongkhlaw, Myllem, Nongstoin, Rambrai, Myriaw, Maharam, Malai-Sohmat, the nomination of the Syiems rests

1. In the extinct Jaintia kingdom, a tradition holds that 14 groups of clans confirmed the newly elected Syiem. In Nongwah Syiemship, the electors consisted of 5 Myntri, 5 Lyngdoh, 3 Basan and 2 Daloi clan representatives. But this Syiemship which comprised Desh Rani and adjoining hills was integrated into Kamrup District. The Jaintia Syiemship sometimes called empire lapsed in 1835 when it was annexed by the British Government.



with the majority of the small electoral body which is recognised in each State.

- (b) In the case of Nongspung, Mawiang, Nobosohphoh, Bhowal and Mawsynram, nomination in the first instance is with the small electoral bodies in each State, but that in the event of their votes not being unanimous, the decision should, in the first four cases, be by popular suffrage, while in the case of Mawsynram it would rest with the Government.

That in the single State of Langrin, where no small electoral body is recognised, the Syiem should be chosen by popular suffrage."

Besides the electoral body, there is a State Cabinet. It is headed by powerful hereditary chiefs in a few States; a few States have chamberlains included in the cabinet. States also follow the old usage of ascribing portfolios of administration to the State Ministers of different titles such as Basans, Lyngdohs, Dalois, Lyngskors and others. A few of them, heads of communes who look after their own jurisdiction, are graded as Ministers. With the Syiems, they execute justice, supervise and superintend the administration of markets and prisons, collection of market tolls and judicial fines. In the Jaintia Hills, Dalois were associated with the Syiem as Ministers and sometimes sent as ambassadors to the Ahom King. Some communes are still headed by persons of royal blood.

Basanship, Lyngdohship or Daloiships are graded as communes following an official title of its head, the commune implying itself a sub-division or a sub-state with a number of village heads each falling under its head. Village heads are elected according to the different usages, some elected by families, some elected by people on the basis of male adult franchise. A Lyngdoh, the head of the State (*viz.* Lyngdohship representing his priestly family) is elected by all the adult males of his *Hima* or State.

These elders and officials are assigned land holdings or shares of market levies or dividends accruing from the excavation of minerals and forests and some share grazing tax. As is customary, delegates from their respective units hand over to the Syiem sacrificial animals and other kinds of tithes. All

categories of land holdings are never taxed, but the Syiem receives military services and presents from the occupants in the crown-lands. Local units or communes and villages are autonomous.

In non-Syiemships, for instance in Shella, the four Wahdadars, the heads of Shella Wahdadarship (Confederacy) are elected by the people. In Sirdarship (Non-Syiemships) a similar system is followed, *i.e.*, the Sirdar is elected by the people of his Sirdarship. No family qualification is necessary. A Lyngdoh, like a Jaintia Daloi, is elected from his respective mother's clan or legitimate groups of clans by the people themselves. All male adults above 18 are eligible to vote for the appointment of their rulers.

Owing to the matrilineal set up, a Syiem is succeeded by his nephew or grand-nephew or by his own brother as succession is reckoned through the woman. This rule subsists in appointments to all offices in the State.

*The Durbars.* Another feature of Khasi democracy is the participation of the entire population in moulding policies, legislation and judicial decision at their Durbars on a principle of de-centralisation than centralisation of powers.

Durbars are numerous. The *Durbar hima pyllun* means a full Syiemship Durbar in which the population of the State participate. To it come all the male residents from whatever place but in view of difficulties posed with regard to organising such a vast gathering, only village delegates, local officials and heads of clans are returned and is called *Ka Durbar ki Shnong*, a Durbar of villages. The Durbar in the past assumed all the vital matters, determined foreign policy, decided questions of war and peace and solved judicial problems. To-day it is still held to approve of or veto proposals laid down by the State Executive Councils. It hears complaints against some illegal actions of Syiems or officials, it hears rival complaints amongst officials. It acts as a Supreme Court and constitutes a real Parliament. It may even veto the appointment of Syiems and officials who on its resolution may be removed. It controls the purse of the States; in the past in times of war it decided lines of strategy, equipments of troops and volunteers and instructed the units to deal with the situation. This kind of Durbar, now-a-days does not meet frequently.

At the District level there is a Durbar Raid (commune), its composition varies from place to place. It is a Durbar of a Unit or a commune or any part thereof which constitutes a sub-unit.

The Syiem and his Council does not interfere in subjects within its jurisdiction in matters such as forest, communications, markets and law which belong to it which as a court of justice, settles judicial cases within its jurisdiction. It approves appointment of any official before referring to the State Council.

Village has its own Durbar which holds frequent sessions in which all male adult residents ought to attend. It imparts some training in the art of Self-Government and creative citizenship and guides or directs the standard of public morality. This Durbar functions as a court of justice by taking criminal and civil cases and judicial disputes, besides handling law and public administration.

The decisions of State Councils fixed by usage in concurrent matters relating to judiciary, foreign relations and communications and markets could not be overridden by local Durbars. A Khasi State, therefore, takes the form of a confederation, the federating units owing allegiance to the Syiem only in common matters, the Syiem's moral duty is to keep alive the unity of the State.

The Syiem is surrounded by a body of messengers whose special duties are to convey messages to nearby and distant places within his realm for the holding of Durbars at appointed dates. Basans, Sirdars and Lyngdoh also as appropriate officials have their respective messengers and volunteers to relay the message in turn. The inhabitants are forbidden to go anywhere and do their day's job. They are required to cancel their business, stop cutting wood and going to market, stop drawing water and all other engagements. No one can go on leave from the session. Everyone ought to contribute to the deliberation in the Durbar in order to ensure success. According to strict usages observed more rigidly in the past, absentees were fined or were expelled from their habitations in which other volunteers were engaged to see the order carried out.

A Syiem or a Deputy Syiem presides over the Durbar; a local Syiem or chieftain presides over the local Durbar while village Durbars are conducted by respective headmen. The

subject for the debate is introduced in a presidential message, other spokesmen are engaged for clarification of some issues which are associated. Deliberations in form of debates then follow and interpellations are raised; trained and eloquent debaters called *Rangsais* lead as movers for and against the motion. Traditions state that a session which would not terminate in a day is adjourned till midnight, fires are served to light up the sittings. Still if complicated conditions prevent a satisfactory completion of the business, the session is adjourned to as many nights and days as are necessary till a satisfactory decision is arrived at. The people consider it an evil to break a session without achieving ultimate objectives.

Durbars are usually held in the open and constitute typical open-door councils. The Councillors sit in concentric rows. Voting usually is indicated by the counting of heads which is always preferred to raising of hands. Women are excluded from such sessions but in some places they are allowed to listen to the debates as observers. Stone slabs and tables, specially constructed, form the ceremonial seats of Syiems and dignitaries but the multitude sit on the ground.

Strict rules prescribed, should be observed. The Durbar is considered a divine agency, now it is called *Ka Durbar Ki blei*, the Durbar of the gods. Attendants should conform to fixed disciplinary rules of conduct in entering the debate which should be systematic and orderly, so as to preclude unseemly shouting or vociferous demonstration, irrelevant expressions and unwise exclamations. Treating the Court of Durbar with contempt amounts to excommunication from the society in which the victim loses his right of citizenship. Abuses and counter-abuses, personal attacks, disparaging remarks, scathing criticism, insinuations, sarcasm and conspiracies are unlawful and persons using such base means are severely dealt with. Strong rules are imposed to penalise any point of contempt. If a Durbari apologises for his behaviour to a Durbar-in-sitting and gives his undertaking for future good conduct, he may be admitted to the sessions, but if he commits disrespectful behaviour for a second time, he renders himself open to heavier punishment. Because such rules are enforced, Khasi democracy tends to become an ideal one.

A British official left on records the conduct of business by the Khasi open-door Parliament which he witnessed in

November 1826 at Nongkhlaw. A British delegation under David Scott had come up from the Kamrup plains to attend this Durbar at Nongkhlaw in an endeavour to get the permission of the Khasis for the construction of a road from Rani Kudam (in Kamrup) to Sylhet District through the Khasi Hills. At that time both Sylhet and the plains of Assam had come under British administration. According to the remarks of one official in the delegation, the conference sat at an open-door Parliament and about 600 were present in the meeting. "The attendants came up the hills, armed with swords, bows and quivers. The Rajah proceeded to explain the object of the meeting and requested the different orators to express their sentiments on the proposition of the British Government. The leading orator on the part of opposition immediately started forth and commenced a long harangue in condemnation of the measure expressed in continuous flow of language, accompanied with much animation of manner and appropriate gesticulation. This was replied to by an orator of the Rajah's party, and, in this manner, the ball was kept rolling until evening.

As it grew dark, the debate being not closed, Mr. Scott grew impatient, and, as he had been wont to do with the Garrows, ordered a dozen bottles of rum to be sent up the hills in the hope of putting an end to it. The liquor was returned, with a message, saying, that they would not drink spirits until they had come to determination upon the point of issue. The next morning the debate was resumed, it was continued through the day, and was closed at midnight, in favour of the proposition of the British Government. The next day the resolution was embodied in a Treaty concluded with the British Government, the Cossyas (Khasis) agreeing to aid in the construction of a road which was to pass through their territory"...

"I was struck with astonishment at the order and decorum which characterised the debates", the official remarked: "No shouts of exultation or indecent attempts to put down the orator of the opposite party; on the contrary every speaker was fairly heard out. I have often witnessed the debates of St. Stephen's Chapel, but those of the Cossea Parliament appear to me to be conducted with more dignity of manner". (Extract from the Memoir of the Late David Scott). The statement gives a vivid picture of Khasis democracy at a time when Khasi culture was in its prime, thriving and in its isolated form. The Rajah referred

to was U Tirot Singh Syiem who in 1829 headed a movement against the British advent into the land, vigorously operating a guerilla warfare against the East India Company till 1833 when he was handed over to his enemy and died a prisoner at Dacca seven years after.

The judicial Durbar sponsored by the Syiem, acts as a Court of justice which irrespective of its powers reduced, is still convened on the occasions when the local authorities fail to dispose of some intricate and technical problems associated with the case. Normally the Syiem would first attempt for reconciliation without bringing the parties to trial. To the trial, headmen concerned bring up their reports. Swearing of oath in the past featured in most of the trials. The oath was phrased thus: "I take on oath, if I tell a lie, the earth shall judge me, the thunder shall destroy me, or if this man speaks a lie, he will lose his stature and his life; he will be cut off from his kith and kin". In swearing an oath, a swearer held a gourd to which arrows were stuck and said that the arrows would pierce him if he told a lie. Another form of swearing an oath was by licking up the salt from the blade of the sword. In Khasi trials, *U Saiphla* (a solicitor or reporter) and *U Sakhi* (Witness) were important persons who brought out the implication of the case on examination. Lawyers who were called *Riewsaid* took an important part in the deliberations and cross-examinations. If the above Durbar failed to arrive at any conclusion, the Syiem ordered a mass trial by which every person was answerable for his action and his connection with the case.

If all normal system of trials fail, trials by ordeals were resorted to as final measure. Ordeal by water as among Garos was widespread in the southern Syiemship. In such cases of water ordeal, a diver who remained longer in water was adjudged by law to have been victorious over his rival diver.

In another case, two ornaments of silver and of gold were immersed in water and the diver who found a golden ornament inside the water was considered to have won over the rival who got the silver jewellery. The Syiem and his court exacted heavy fees from the disputants and the person who won was reimbursed part of heavy judicial fines imposed on the defeated party which was paid both in cash and kind (mostly with pork).

Cases not sent up to the state court are decided by the village Durbar. A village headman, a Lyngdoh or Sirdar (or

an official of whatever other designation) acts as magistrate and police chief in respect of the execution of justice. He with the village Durbar pronounces judgement and inflicts judicial penalties. The same Durbar also decides the civil cases. In the Jaintia Hills, a Daloi with his Durbar settles disputes. All this shows that the power to decide cases belongs to the Durbars and that the heads of States are mere magistrates.

Now-a-days, the Syiems and his Myntris constitute the Court of appeal, and many cases are dealt with by them without referring to Durbars of the entire population, as was done in the past. Thus the Syiem's Court is possessed with appellate jurisdiction and authority inside the State. This has resulted from the recognition of Government and District Courts as more powerful than the State Courts. The Courts of Syiems are prescribed to take up the cases within certain limits. The Court of the District Council is now possessed of judicial functions which supersede the State Courts. But village Durbars still function as judicial Courts to decide cases and execute justice inside their respective units. Appeals to the Syiem's court are sent only if the village Durbar fails to decide cases which are either complicated or lay beyond the scope of their powers.

W. Robinson<sup>1</sup> remarked, that on the day of the sitting of a judicial Durbar, villagers stopped to do their work and it was compulsory and binding on their part by law to attend and participate in it. "The proceedings were opened by a headman and witnesses raised and the Chief at the close summarised the evidences on both sides and with the decision of the Durbar pronounced judgement". Describing its sitting, he said that the Durbar was "something probably after the fashion of the ancient Druids, or as was the custom of the Greeks when the herald spoke, the aged judges sat on squared stone, in circle for debates".

Judicial fines varied from a few Rupees to Rs. 1,100.00 in the latter cases if crimes were serious. Life imprisonment, expatriation and keeping in stocks (*Pyndait diengsong*) were the severest forms of penalty. Prisoners were kept inside the cave. Death sentences in the past were not absent, criminals being beaten to death with clubs or by being pushed from over a precipice. Death sentences were served with executions also.

1. Selection from *Calcutta Review*, Vol. VII, September, 1856.

Even at present, democratic traits still survive; to quote from a Report of the Committee on Special Multi-purpose Tribal Blocks issued by the Ministry of Home Affairs, New Delhi on the aspects of a Khasi Durbar: "Every village is traditionally governed by a Durbar which consists of all the adult male members of village . . . the Durbar chooses its own office bearers. The Durbars have recently been recognised by Government through an Act passed by the District Council and they have powers to inflict fines up to Rs. 50.00. . . . There was a case in Majrang itself where a man was fined Rs. 450, and paid up, since otherwise he would have been excommunicated by village community. The Durbars see to everything, they coordinate every aspect of Khasi life, settle disputes and have always looked after the forests, water supply and such community services". Only a few states such as Myllem and Khyrim now have a police force.

The village has a corporate existence and character. On the day of the *Khang Shnong*, all village residents are bound by law to join hands in the prescribed social welfare works of the village—like stone pulling ceremonies and megalithic erections, construction of roads and bridges and markets and making provisions for water supply. Even the construction of new houses for new-comers is performed conjointly by the villagers. Harvest of paddy is also undertaken conjointly in rotation from one field to another, food being provided to the workers by the owners of fields.<sup>1</sup> Rules imposed to enforce corporate and conjoint actions are severe. Absentees are heavily fined or the whole village is asked to have no dealing or association with them. Other compulsory means are adopted to isolate such absentees from the community. They thus become excommunicated or as a final means expelled from their village. They had to leave the village emptied-body and carry nothing.

### Citizenship

Families which preceded others in settlement are called *Ki Khun Nyng-kong* (or literally the first children or group of the first citizens) who have continued to enjoy special privileges of citizenship. The next group which joined them are called *Ki Khun Pdeng* (the second children or citizens) and the last batch

1. Community works of this nature are common among all the Tribes.



are called *Ki Khun Khadduh* (youngest children). These groups paid no tax whatever and were co-partners with the Syiem in running the administration. Military clans were entitled to a noble status in recognition of their service in defending their land. Seniority in occupation of the land was, therefore, a criterion which determined citizenship. But contribution of invaluable service in both welfare and warfare were other conditions that qualified settlers to become citizens.

Khasi emigrants are known as *Khun Soh Syiem*; they pay no tax but are bound to recognise the state by paying *Ka Pynshok* which is graded as protection fee and is not classed as tax or revenue. Another group of citizens is called *Khun Shnat* (tributary). They were the latest group who joined the State and become naturalised citizens.

Non-Khasis, annexed by virtue of conquest, paid a regular revenue to the Khasi Syiem or Chief in the Hills. Prior to 1835, 450 square miles of the parganas in Sylhet and Cachar division were under the Jaintia Syiemship, so also limits of other Syiemships—Khyrim, Bhowal, Maharam, Mawiang, Nongstoin, Langrin and Nongkhlaw as well as the Chiefs of Mawdon, Shella, Dwara-Nongtyrnem extended themselves into Bangladesh and various areas in Assam comprised in modern Cachar, Mikir Hills, Goalpara, Kamrup and Nowgong.

Non-Khasis inside the Syiemships, Wahdadarship and Sirdarships enjoy a large measure of autonomy. Their village units even to-day are governed by their headman (Gaonburas or Malvis or Gramanis), return small taxes to the Syiems and dignitaries and report cases. In the Bangladesh border, not only land-grants (for the construction of masjids and temples) but fisheries and a small proportion of land called *Khas* land free of cost, for public use have been assigned.

*Land tenure*—the original classification of land was two-fold—*Ri Kurs*<sup>1</sup> and *Ri Raids* (Rajs); the former belonged to the whole clan, held in a collective possession; the latter was a village land held in joint ownership by a single village or group of villages and was managed by either a village or State authority. It was meant to be distributed to subsequent new settlers

1. Some *Ri Kurs* in the west are very large estates comprising a number of villages, groves, paddy fields and *Khutis* in them.

who would be entitled a permanent ownership if they conformed to prescribed rules and usages in exchange for the protection granted to them by the State. They were required to pay a *Pynshok*, a tributary fee, to the State. Those settlers might be awarded with membership in State Council if their conduct was satisfactory. In its original concept, Raid constituted a sort of nobody's land kept apart for new settlers. It is important to note that the usages governing free occupation of Raid lands and inheritance to them are still in force to-day.

Several plots of Ri-Kurs in the form of ancestral land become inherited and become Ri Kynti or family land as distinct from ancestral land. Another class of land, *Ri-Seng*, which is prevalent in South Khasi Hills is also a clan's land held in collective ownership and management. *Ri Khein*, yet another class, constitutes a land conjointly possessed by a particular group. Sacred groves known as *Law Lyngdoh* are prohibited for public use.

*State and local ceremonies.* The foremost surviving religious festival is the *Pomblang Nongkrem* or *Shad Nongkrem*, observed annually at the Syiem's headquarters in Smit or the Khyrim Syiemship. This great Khasi festival centres round the goats' sacrifice. It lasts for five days.

The first and second nights are featured by prayers in which the state congregation led by the High Priest offer prayers to their deities and their ancestors. On the third day occurs the moving off of a congregation in a stately procession from the ling-sad to an open sacred grove at some distance where the Syiem or his prince-partner, sacrifices a cock to invoke their deities bless the people of the State. A hop-sotch dance follows restricted to males only including the Syiem, eminent then priests and artists. The procession is arranged in batches in which musketeers lead, then musicians and dancers, followed by a royal party, then delegates and nobles, followed by the mass of people and observers. Drum-beats resound and dancers dance along the procession. At midnight a collection of he-goats from numerous delegations is held, the delegations being called in turn. The first batch of goats is a herd of the royal goats tendered by the Syiem-Sad, accompanied by the attendant goats that make up the royal donation. The fourth day witnesses a massive sacrifice of goats, in which the Syiem and the Deputy Syiem initiates the decapitation before the priests and

their assistants proceed to decapitate the rest from the herds. The goats sacrifice, however, is preceded by a preliminary sacrifice of 12 fowls for the representative houses of the high clans of the State including the Syiem's family. At dawn-break on that day, a maiden dance is held in which virgins from the royal house inaugurate whence, the princesses shaded by umbrellas, dance with great solemnity. Then follows the full community dance in which men and women dancers participate. On the last night, a very solemn thanks-giving Assembly (*Durbar Nguh Blei*) is held in which prayers to the Supreme God are said by the Syiem and his chief priest while the people quietly bow down their heads.

In Cherra Syiemship, the notable festival is the coronation-cum-cremation ceremony performed by a Syiem's successor as an obligatory duty to his deceased Syiem predecessor. The corpse of the deceased Syiem heavily embalmed with honey and liquor is kept inside a wooden coffin with a pipe attached to its bottom to drain out the decayed matter to the ground below. It is preserved for months and even years as a long time is entailed to cover all preparations, the construction of a pyre and bier and carvings connected in which the service of skilful carpenters and masons is employed, the preparations being neatly chalked out in detail in a somewhat slow process. While these preparations go on stage by stage, the electoral college of twelve Myntris are engaged in choosing a new Syiem who seems qualified enough to cope with the cremation. After having him elected, the date of his investiture is announced.

At investiture, the Syiem, seated on a chair is crowned by a Nongrum Myntri, the chamberlain who winds a turban on his head. An exchange of address as regards portfolios occurs between the two. The Syiem distributes costly presents to each of his 12 Myntris in which he expects such performances will establish them as his co-workers.

The Syiem accompanied by his Myntris and nobles, local and village delegates move to the Cherra market to perform a sacrifice of goats. The Syiem hands over 13 goats to Myntri clans to be cut. The cutting of these goats is accompanied by the firing of guns as well as music played by drummers and pipers. The Syiem is next met by the various delegates from

all over the State who acknowledge their fidelity to him with their presents. Now, that the formal ceremony is over, the Syiem is legitimately entitled to clear the business of cremation awaiting him.

The cremation of the deceased Syiem is performed with all pomp and ceremony. The formalities may be briefly outlined as follows: on the day of the cremation, before the corpse is borne to the funeral ground, the Syiem is met by the various delegates from all over the Syiemship, who tender to him a decorated<sup>1</sup> he-goat for the sacrifice. All groups and units including people from Angajur, Fahtepur, Bholaganj in the plains, also donate such animals. Exchanges of addresses and ceremonial allegiances follow, after which sacrifices of the goats and lambs are held; the sacrifices are accompanied by a war dance of two male dancers, one dancer representing the Syiem and his family and the other the delegation. At noon the cortage is brought out of the house and laid on a huge platform which is borne by over 300 men. The coffin with its cover is overlaid with intricate decorations of gold and silver and painted with gorgeous colours. It is draped with black and red robes. People in thousands attend the funeral procession which moves off according to ranks in different batches. Musketeers, dancers, pipers and drummers are in front, followed by the party of the royal house and their attendants, and these are followed by several delegations with the mass of people behind. Moving in the procession, the musketeers fire their guns, dancers move along in their dignified dancing, pipers and drummers play tunes of lamentation, chanters cite their farewell phrases to the corpse and the several delegations raise their respective banners.

At the funeral pyre (a masonry), the Syiem is met by the delegates who congratulate him on his masterly task of performing such a splendid state cremation ceremony. The Syiem makes a formal reception of the delegations one after another and exchanges of addresses are made.

Ceremonies like those of Cherra were observed in all the Khasi States in the past. Traditions still recount of such coronation ceremonies in Mawsynram, Jaintia and the Shillong

1. Their horn decorated with silver ore ven gold cases forged of the pure metals.

Syiemships. Other State ceremonies centreing round the sacrifice of goats were important throughout all Khasi Syiemships. Girding of head dress was an important investiture ceremony. In some States, a high priest performs the girding whereas in other States, a Syiem-mother or *Kni-Syiem* (Syiem's maternal uncle) conducts the ceremony. Swearing of the oaths of allegiance is a governing usage in all cases of investiture.

The heads of units are also instituted to office by investiture ceremonies. A Daloi in Jaintia Hills on being elected to office, is given a formal investiture by mounting him over a sacred stone in the market after which the nobles of the ruling clans, gird a turban on his head. This is followed by pouring of libations over a stone. Then betels are served to participants. Lyngdohs as elected officials also receive investiture ceremonies. Even Basans are given investiture ceremonies on their appointment. But, because they are minor heads, the ceremony is deprived of the pomp and splendour which attends coronation of the royal dignitaries.

Such festivals at local level are also held at the important Daloiship. The well-known *Beh Dien Khlam* at Jowai centres round the internment of a trunk of tree (representing plague) inside the stream. At the Nartiang, Sutnga, Shangpung, other festivals are held. In the past, on the eve of the principal festivals, Dalois went down to Jaintiapur and received from the hands of the Syiem, a toolah of gold, guns, plates, vessels, costumes and jeweleries and other instruments which he brought to his own headquarters for use in the festivals of the Daloiship. Prominent Dalois served as ambassadors to foreign courts and spent half of the year in Jaintiapur, assisting the Syiem in running the administration on which occasions, judicial and other state Durbars were held to dispose of certain cases. The Syiem used to visit and inspect the Hill once a year and undertook tours throughout the kingdom. The temporary headquarters of the Syiemship in the Hills were at Nartiang and occasionally at Borkhat. The Jaintia Syiem were rich in view of the direct revenue they derived from people in the plains and in view of the vast crown-lands they possessed in the Hills. Like other Khasi Syiems they possessed their treasure houses, and when Jaintiapur was fortified, a large number of cannon was procured for the defence of the capital.

## HISTORY

### The Garos

The early history of the Garos is shrouded in mystery. The forefathers of the Garos allied to Koches, Chutiyas, Kacharis and Meches came from the north-west, but while some of the Koches and the Kacharis had, in the passage of time, become Hinduised, the Garos still retain their originality.<sup>1</sup> The Bodo people are believed, at one time, to have been diffused from Tibet through different routes, in the several waves of migration. Another tradition ascribing some support to this theory, maintains that the Garos are descended from their forefathers in Asong Tibetgori, who had their own literature preserved on the scrolls, who used match locks and smelted iron.<sup>2</sup> The Garos in the Kamrup plain, recount a tradition that their forefathers came eastward from the Himalayas and reached Gondulghat where they made a brief halt, and on leaving that place, traversed to Sadiya, from where they trekked on into the north bank of the Brahmaputra. After a long westward trail, they reached Amingaon by using a roundabout route. There in the North bank their life was not secure and because the enemy invaded their abodes, their forefathers built many rafts of plaintain trees over which they crossed the Brahmaputra river and came to occupy Kamakhya. They occupied it for some generations until the Koches came to

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1. Adi and Mishmi seem to have in common with Garo linguistically and some attributes of Garo customs seem to be identical with those of Naga.

2. Rongmuthu, *Folk-Tales of the Garos*, p. 1.

invade the Garo Kingdom. Probably the Khasis then staying at Kamrup fought jointly with the Garos against the enemy but the tradition does not ascribe the name of the race to which the enemy belonged.

The tradition has it that the succeeding people at Kamrup adopted the Garo rite of revering the ancient mother which became blended with the Hindu ritual. Kamakhya appears to have been occupied both by the Garo and the Khasi people who adopted a common matrilineal system of household and social organisation after one treaty concluded, when they celebrated their victory over their common enemy. Kamakhya seems to have been derived from *Ka-ma-kha*, a Garo word which means 'victory to my mother'. Kamakhya is said to have been derived from Khasi *Ka Meikha*, the ancient mother and which seems to be a meeting place between Khasis and Garos where Juge Silcha, a Garo maiden, was married to a Khasi prince. From Gauhati, wave after wave of westward migration poured to the Garo outer hills, and later on penetrated the interior hills of their present abode. Probably those who crossed the hills and advanced Mymensing further south were the earliest immigrants whereas those who came later on, now confined into their present settlement at Goalpara and Kamrup, belonged to the later immigrants. The Brahmin keepers of the Kamakhya temple, according to another tradition, were of Garo origin whose ancient mother was transformed into a Hindu goddess, Kamakhya Devi, and was appeased with human sacrifices at the principal pujabs. According to another tradition, the temple was built by a Garo architect in honour of the goddess of prolificacy.

Garo traditions centre round one of their great kings, Nokma Abong Chirepu who united and wielded the different tribes in the land under one kingdom and made them a people. The Ambeng, Kotchu, Akawe, Duab, Atong, Me. gam, all acknowledged his suzerainty whose headquarters was raised on Mongri hill overlooking the Simsong. He introduced the division of labour in which various groups emerged such as black-smiths, potters, cow-herds, fishermen, craftsmen, artists, soldiers, hunters, statesmen and others. There are many other traditions which speak of powerful kings in the past who exercised jurisdiction over the various groups of people scattered in the land. We do not know why this form of State

polity became disintegrated into village. Chirepa is remembered to have brought many new things of civilisation.

The Garos preserve different legends of their migration into their present abode. According to one tradition, they came migrating on from Kamrup to Rongtung-bari, Sameguru, Rangshal, Agal, Dileng and Patal and proceeded to Matiapanshia in Goalpara district where they settled on for some time. There was a market at Matiapanshia where Garos, Digils, M. egams, Khasis and Ranga Kutches traded and bartered, the market was known as Sangkadik Wakmitim. They lived under their respective kings for 129 years. It appears the different tribes were consolidated in a confederation. It was there, the sons of Siram (or Sirampe), children of Me. gam-Nongal, Ronga Kutch and Doli tribesmen agreed to confine heirship to daughters, the Kutchu and Doli representatives being the first to adopt the cross-cousin marriage. The two Rajahs, Sirampe and Mugading Sepa also consented to the proposal. This was agreed to during a great feast held in the house of Bonepa, one of the Rajahs of Rangbaldi-Rangbalda at Matia Panshia in which delegates from all over the different Garo and northern Khasi realms, were entertained at the feast with meat, pork and fowls and beers brewed of rice, millet and maize. The consent thus obtained, the different groups of Garos in the different batches skirted over the dense jungle of the wild mountain tract. It is said that the batch led by Aiuk Rajah and Asilik Gitel with Simbe and Sambe their respective wives, of the Lyngngams or M. egams, were settled at Godaram Speram and spread to Dalram Sek Segram on western Khasi Hills border. Another batch went on exploring the enchanting Simsang Valley which soon was inhabited. Buia, Rengwa, Salbong, Suakpa, Nengilpa, Nibo and Changbo brought another more vigorous batch which finally was settled at Demik A. ding and Kimarong-Patal where the colonists lifted up stones to thank Kalkame, their god of atmosphere and climate. A group of them emerged into Chambilgre in the valley of Dareng river. Stories still told are of Joreng Do. reng of great physical prowess who, while exploring the Tura range, killed a monstrous hawk which had killed and carried off both men and cows, and of other stalwart men who killed elephants and strangled with wild beasts armed with flint stones and spears only. Another batch went beyond the hills and stayed at Mymensing. The suzerainty of Abing Chirepa had penetrated each and every tribe in the land of the great A. chik people.



Among the Garos, memories fortunately are fresh and green about their forefathers, who came in a migration unlike other tribes who for this and that reason, have lost their traditions in the dim mist of obscurity. On emerging from the fabulous snowy heights, the people were not content to stay on the eastern-most edge of the country but proceeded westward to their present abode. It is not known why they were parted off their close kinsmen such as Koch and Kachari and their sojourn into the west has just faded into a tradition and legend with some historical bias. So much of their early history is an unrecorded past.

We do not know if any alliance was ever projected among Meches and Garos or among Kacharis and Garos. Both the Koches and Kacharis established powerful kingdoms in Assam but a tradition upholds the existence of a Garo kingdom comprising the Garo Hills and some portions of Goalpara under one banner, when they successfully routed the external aggressors. But time came when disintegration was effected, leading to the growth of the Garo village polity discernible from the state organisation. There is no denying the fact that the Bodo kingdom so extensive, stretched from NEFA and North-Eastern Assam (under the Chutiya in Lohit) to Dimapur (Kachari) and to Kamrup and Garo Hills as far as Mymensing. A tradition even ascribes Gaur the ancient kingdom in Bengal as of Garo derivation. That kingdom was founded by a Garo king.

Many times the Ahoms, according to a tradition, fought with the Garos although during Mir Jumla's invasion of Assam, sponsored by emperor Aurangzeb, a formidable alliance, another tradition says, with the Ahoms was pledged, to resist the enemy. During the many Muslim invasions, the Garos and the Khasis fought jointly against the invaders near Mymensing, the two peoples cementing a fraternal alliance on one occasion by planting a stone, celebrating their victory over the enemy. The stone, they say, can still be seen somewhere near Moheskhala.

A recorded history comes with the British advent. The East India Company in 1765 took possession of Gawalpara (Goalpara) following its renunciation by a Mogul emperor in an agreement concluded with the British Government. The same year, Sylhet District was also obtained as a Dewani from

the Moguls. With the advent of the East India Company, tension had grown between the Garos and the plains men; but even before that, the more serious conflicts had taken place between the local zamindars and the Garos. As such conflicts had grown, the Mogul authorities at Delhi decided to guard their boundaries and entrusted a class of zamindars known as Choudhuries to protect their dominion; a militia was placed with them. The Choudhuries enjoyed large autonomy and owed to Moguls a nominal tribute of birds, pigeons, ivory and sandal-wood. The Choudhuries at the same time, were empowered to collect rent inside their own estate, and arranged trade with the hills and other neighbouring places. These zamindars seemed to enjoy more liberties than were the other governors and other Vice-gerencies under the Moguls. The tribute due from them was trifling which complied with the artistic needs of the Moguls. The Zamindars imposed levies upon Garo traders. They held a monopoly of the Garo cotton, renowned for its quality. Zamindars which Garos had dealing were Howrahghat, Mechpara, Kalumalupara, Karaibari, Sushong, Sherpore and Bijni (the latter ruled by the Rajah). The Garos being exploited, were from time to time incited to revolt. Large groups of Garos settled at the plains were also exploited. Such strained relations subsisted in the long decades of Mogul rule. The earliest known raids perpetrated by Garos were localised at Kalumalara. The raids following at Mechpara had caused an exodus of the population from that place elsewhere. More troubles would have ensued with the Rajah of Bijni but for a timely intervention of the sepoys at the disposal of the Government from Jogighopa in Goalpara, the force having been stationed in Goalpara to meet any eventuality arising of the Garo raids into the Company's dominion. The Garos reacted by suspending their trade in cotton with the plains. The Garo inroads mounted up from 1795 to 1807.

New administrative regulations were enforced since 1765, the date in which the allegiance of the Zamindars was transferred to the Government, when a revenue collector was placed at Rangmati, a new arrangement being made that the Zamindars would pay revenue in cotton to the Government in place of other trifling goods and all tribute was now directed to be deposited at Rangmati.<sup>1</sup> In a later arrangement, since 1793

1. However, Sidli and Bijni handed over revenue with elephants.

payment in cash was replaced for cotton. From 1794, market transit dues were charged upon goods passing through the Zamindaris with the result that the burden fell heavily upon the Garo traders in the plains.

Garo head-hunters were then actively engaged in carrying off enemy-heads motivated by the religious demand on the occasion of the cremation of their chiefs; skulls were also valued as village trophies. There were other reports of human sacrifice. Many persons were carried off from the plains as slaves. The loss of cotton markets also caused other difficulties. Clan vendatta and inter-tribe feuds filled up the pages of history. Moreover, we learn that Garo landlords fought with other Garo chiefs while on the other occasions, Garo Zamindars waged war with the non-Garo landlords. In the hills, stories told are of some major conflicts which had taken place amongst Nokmas themselves although some Garos had formed a defensive alliance against their neighbours.

The Government, on the other hand, was seriously concerned with the state of affairs prevalent and the causes of the crisis were studied. It led to the appointment of a Commission to assess the situation from all angles. The Commission examined the affairs elaborately and brought over their report. The Commission recommended that all *hat* levies hitherto imposed upon the Garos be abolished and the Zamindars be paid compensation for their renunciation of rights. This measure was largely devised to pacify the Garos with a view to mitigate the number of raids from the hills. But it brought about a confrontation from the Zamindars. The Rajah of Karaibari took up his stand and challenged the measure up-till 1815, the date in which of course he was subdued. To rectify his claims, he had taken steps to reduce the neighbouring Garos to complete subjection. His estate was closed down. It had taken some time to dispose of it owing to the oscillation among the bidders. Irrespective of these pacifying measures adopted, Garos still increased on their raids between 1795 and 1807 which had brought large tolls. Within 10 years before 1816, Garos ravaged a number of villages and caused loss of 178 lives. Karaibari was exposed to large-scale raids in 1806 alone. Head-hunters in considerable swarms lurked the area in the plains and during each visit, came back home with a large number of skulls which attained eminence at village dances and festivals.

The measure hitherto adopted had not proved successful. The next move of the Government was the deputation of Mr. Thomas Sisson, Joint Magistrate, Rangpur to study the situation in 1815. Sisson undertook the task and came out finally with a recommendation to appoint a Commissioner in charge of these relations.

In 1816, Mr. David Scott was appointed as a Special Commissioner. On him had devolved the task to re-assessing such relations in a complicated set up and formulate a plan to treat the Garos at a different footing, i.e., to say, separate them from the Zamindaris' influences. The subjugation of Karaibari Rajah in 1815 no doubt, had relieved a section of Garos from the Zamindaris' exploitations, but Garos settled at the Zamindaris' located in the plains area were still subject to the Zamindaris' control. Mr. Scott submitted an elaborate report on these conditions. On the basis of his recommendation, the Regulation X of 1822 was promulgated which bifurcated the thanahs of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari from the jurisdiction of the Rangpur District and consolidated them into the District, North-East of Rangpur called Garo Hills, the District of Goalpara included it. The Commissioner was in charge of the District vested with judicial, police and collectorate powers, he was to work under the direct orders of the Governor-General-in-Council with full powers to conclude terms with other Garo Chiefs.

Mr. Scott, now Civil Commissioner to the charge of Goalpara, Dhubri and Karaibari thanahs, after they were bifurcated from Rangpur, started to negotiate with the various Garo Chiefs and later on concluded terms with those Chiefs who wished to accept British protection and promised to submit themselves to the jurisdiction of the British courts and police stations and abstain from head-hunting. They were allowed to carry trade on the plains except Garos in the interior hills who, in exchange for passage, were conditioned to pay duties. The Garo area, under a new arrangement, was divided into two divisions—*Nazarana* mahals and *Zamindari* mahals. The former applied to the highlanders who without being actually subject to the British laws were, in some sort, under the British jurisdiction and were tributary to the British authority. *Zamindari* mahals returned the revenues and deposited them to the Government, out of which the zamindars were paid compensation. Besides,

there was a group of Independent villages excluded; it was they who protracted the annexation and consolidation of the entire tract for several decades. It was up-till 1873 that the annexation was consummated. The Garo Sarbarakar was appointed to deposit the revenue collected by the Laskars and the Sirdars; they with their Sarbarakar were to receive compensation in the form of remuneration in addition to the official costume. The new Commissioner's jurisdiction was geographically to extend over the Garo Hills but the true administrative control was exercised in the hills not until the formal annexation in 1866. The system had not removed the Garos totally from the hold of Zamindars in a considerable territory in which Garos had many obligations to perform.

Many stories told are of David Scott, the first white man who was acquainted with the Garos and received at their homes. He attended many council sittings with the Nokmas. His adventures in the face of oppositions and plots in the unfriendly circles are also told but he escaped all the perils by the dint of his strong wits. Scott was versatile and creative in many fields. He urged the Government to set up a school for the dissemination of education to Garos. Mr. Fermie, a school teacher, was appointed to a first school in Singimari but the educational project received death-blow in the sudden death of Fermie and the project was revived not until 1847 when another Garo school at Goalpara was set up, supported by Captain Jenkins, Commissioner. According to a tradition, 3 Garo boys were sent to a Serampore for study during Scott's time. David Scott was later on associated with the Khasis from 1826 up-till his death in August 1831. The educational project was finally consummated with the coming of the American Baptist Mission afterwards at the invitation of the people themselves and after a field was prepared by themselves.

The new settlement had better results. The territory claimed by the Garos and that claimed by the Zamindars, where the area of conflicts was confined, became consolidated and declared transferred to Government. Under this arrangement, Zamindars renounced their rights over their *hats* and were paid compensation. Rent to be returned from mahals in the transferred territory called Garo mahals was regularised and the area was assessed to house tax. Within a short time between 100 and 200 Garo chieftains, west of the Simsang river, came to

open negotiation with Mr. Scott. The settlement brought about a temporary pacification. 'But the extra-ordinary custom of burning human skulls with the bodies of their deceased still prevails, and is the cause of committing frequent murders on the people of the plains'.

When Mr. Scott was appointed Agent to the Governor-General for the North-eastern frontier in November, 1823, resulting from the Burmese invasion, his place was taken by the principal Assistant to the Commissioner assisted by a Garo Sarbarakar. In 1826, the Goalpara District which comprised Garo Hills was attached to Assam.

The peaceful state was soon broken up by an uprising when 700 Garos rose against their landlord at Sherpore. As the case was with the Angami Nagas, the Government at first resorted to a policy of non-interference with the view to shirk off responsibility for administering these inaccessible areas, motivated by the need to avoid exorbitant expenditure for taking this hitherto desolate area to the administration. The Government, at times, closed down the markets to the Garos for preventing further recurrence of raids but it bore little effect. Garey, using metaphors at random to illustrate the strain of non-intervention, writes thus: 'When now and again some more than ordinary ferocious raids had desolated old villages and filled frontier marts with horror, a company of sepoys and police would struggle up into the hills, and after first burning the first village they could find, hurry down again, half of them ill with fever and the rest half maimed from stumbling over the pitfalls of an enemy they have seen.'

Many more difficulties were encountered by the authorities in dealing with the Garos as the arrangement did not seem to provide a long-term solution. The tribute due from them, as resolved upon during the previous agreement, was not punctually paid so that Government was prone, from time to time, to despatch expeditions into their hills. Mr. Robertson, successor to David Scott adopted several punitive measures to bring them to terms. In 1833 the expedition despatched from Goalpara came into conflicts with Garos at Cherangiri and of course many chiefs, hard pressed by the advent of this expedition, were forced to accept conditions. But in 1834-35, owing to other difficulties which cropped up, the Government conserving the available strength, brought some of their chiefs to their

senses, and the amount of tribute and fines due from them was paid. The British officials had to repeat their visits into the most sensitive areas such as Rissogiri where incidents had taken place.

The Ambeng Garos grouped in the Desani mahal were the most contumacious who withheld payment of the revenue for numerous years although in 1834-35, (chiefs of this group) after having been reduced by the well organised force, came to an Agreement with the Government in which they promised to refrain from killing each other, to abandon the practice of hanging human skulls in their houses, to seek the Government assistance for the adjudication of sentences for cases which they could not settle themselves, to contribute materials and labourers as might be required in road-constructions, to turn up when called for by the Government officers at Bangalkatta, to check up passage of any independent Garos into Government territories with intentions to cause any disturbances, to make prompt payment of revenues when called to do so and to help maintain the road from Bhajamara to Kuntanagiri and from Bangalkatta to Ripogiri. It soon showed, however, that these terms had never been punctually observed in full. Moreover, internecine warfare among themselves prevented many terms and conditions from being observed. Shortly after the above terms were embodied, the Commissioner, whose post was constituted in 1824, visited Singimari to assess the situation arising from these troubles. No measure for long-term settlement had yet been envisaged. All the measures hitherto adopted were experimental devices. Shortly after the Commissioner who was an Agent to the Governor-General accomplished his visit, troubles again brewed in another form. Now the intricate problem emerged from the foothills owing to the withholding of payment of tribute by the people. An expedition was sent in 1837 which efforts were almost successful as arrears of tribute hitherto withheld were promptly collected. In 1844, Chhayani and Desani mahals were effected by wars waged among the different groups in which payment of tribute was withheld again. Many Garos were against the payment of revenue and held all that was agreed with the Government was done by the previous generation in which they were not a party.

In 1847 an expedition marched to Kissogiri to investigate matters in connection with the murder of one Nokma, loyal

to the Government who had called upon his people to pay revenue. But a handful of sepoys despatched in the expedition was found inadequate to cope with the situation. Another expedition was sent after, but the local warriors fell upon the sepoys and wounded some of them. This matter dragging on, the Government was at last forced to adopt more vigorous measures; the expedition placed in the charge of Capt. Reynolds was urged to do all that it could within its power to make the impact of such expedition strongly felt and localised not upon a single village alone but upon other villages also who might have cultivated such recalcitrant attitude. An elaborately organised operation was resumed. At Bhoogamara, the first base, Reynolds bore upon the neighbouring village chiefs to aid in the road-construction while at Bangalkatta where he next reached, the local people provided him guides to accompany him. Kissogiri, the village implicated in these undesired activities, was deserted and so Ripugiri, the next village, was found abandoned. Full punishment, however, was meted out when that village was burned. To Rangtupara where he next halted, many chiefs came and expressed their desire to remain allegiant to the Government although such commitments were ephemeral. The events which followed showed that the Garos were as hostile as before to the Government.

In 1852 seven raids are recorded in which 44 persons were killed. A village implicated, during the visit of an expedition was burnt; further measures were followed by effecting a blockade of the hills which brought about some salutary effect for some time, but again from 1856 to 1859, many raids were perpetrated.

Now it was found that the enforcement of the blockade of the hills did not bring about the desired result. The mountaineers managed to draw supplies with the other means. The blockade, in fact, hit hard the loyal subjects in the plain.

The Viceroy, Lord Dalhousie, advocated the policy of non-intervention, as the most effective means to deal with the tribes, while recommending some conciliatory measures to pacify them.

In 1861, non-intervention in the face of such troubles, was found hardly suitable. Moreover, the effort of the Government to punish the village of Daggal, a village concerned in



some raids, was foiled at the first two instances although on the third occasion, it was occupied by police who after inflicting penalty, withdrew.

Relations became worsened when the Sushong Raja sought to exert his claims upon the hills and collect revenue at the highlands which led to the outburst of the revolts but an expedition soon went up the hills to stamp out the uprising. But the hills continued to be disturbed as the villages overlooking Mymensing were causing frequent raids into the plains in protest against the Rajah's continued exaction of tribute from the people. In March 1866, two columns of police visited the area and meted out the necessary punishment to the villages.

Conciliatory measures had also brought no stable adjustment of relation with the Garos as with the Nagas at a temporary time. Attempts were made just before the consolidation of the administration to entrust police powers to the Laskars and the Garo *zimmandars* with police functions were created and more effective steps were taken to reduce the powers of the zamindars. Other means were envisaged to counter-act raids from the hills. However, all these did not bring about any lasting solution to the problems.

The Government finally abandoned non-intervention and adopted a forward policy and the process of consolidation was worked out from July 1866 in which date, Lt. W. G. Williamson took over as the Deputy Commissioner for the Garo Hills, he was responsible to the Commissioner of Cooch Behar. Advance for Tura was made which was selected as the new headquarters. All the neighbouring villages were called upon to join the new administration. Since 1868, the Deputy Commissioner exercised jurisdiction over the Garo Hills on behalf of the Commissioner, Cooch Behar perhaps known later as Commissioner of Goalpara and Garo Hills District.

Thus a modern history of Garo commenced. During the same year another District, the Naga Hills District was born. The consolidation of both mountain tracts arose from the same necessity to check up raids from the hills although Garo history however was mingled with the Zamindari system. Yet when Tura was occupied, a big mountain tract, still classed Independent, was also to be dealt with and consolidated. Active administration was started. Roads were built to link the

new headquarters with the principal villages. Police force was attached to the administration. Announcement was made of annexation and messages were tendered to the Independent Garo villages. Nokmas and Laskars came on to receive the promulgation. The Independent villages were still out. The annexation and consolidation had become difficult for accomplishment in the absence of the adequate means of communication and physical confrontation.

A final adjustment was necessitated with the Zamindars whose claims extended to the hills. Adjustment with Mymensing was earlier made, but the pretensions of the Sushong Rajah right up to the middle region, were now to be considered. In 1862 the Government enunciated their decision to exclude the tract north of Mymensing from the territorial jurisdiction of the Zamindars and the merger of that area, in the portion of the Goalpara district which comprised Garo Hills. It was also felt desirable to extend the administration of the latter district into the new area. But the Rajah did not relinquish his claims.

The Government, however, persisted on the need to alter the boundary and by the Act XXII of 1868, that portion of the area hitherto defined, was merged into the Garo hills and placed under the direct administration of the Deputy Commissioner. A boundary settlement was worked out with Zamindars and those who forfeited their claims for good were paid compensation.

Excluding the independent Garos confined in the hills, the Zamindari Garos had been returning regular revenue credited in the District treasury in Goalpara, out of which Zamindars were paid compensation while the remainder of the revenue returned was divided among the Government and the collectors returned in the form of their remunerations. The tribute due from the Nazarana Garos was irregular and not paid punctually for which reason, the Government had been previously sending expedition to collect the arrears of revenue and issue other directions. The independent Garos were until the annexation, outside the jurisdiction of control and had caused trouble from time to time. Various modes of payment existed at the Zamindari, Nazarana and Khas mahals. Some villages returned the tribute village-wise collectively but others returned a house tax.

Rapid steps were adopted to evolve administrative consolidation. The Government was hard pressed with conflicts between the dependent and the independent villages which had incursions near and far. Moreover, Mandalgiri, an independent village with her allies assaulted the villages of Macholgiri and Chandeegiri. The Government was due now to interfere. Williamson's intervention in July, 1868 was foiled owing to the inhospitable means of communication and the inadequate number of men to cope with the situation. Moreover, summons sent to the headmen of the independent villages concerned were not complied with and matters were worsened by the continued attacks launched upon the dependent villages in October 1868. In these circumstances, Williamson at the head of the larger expedition marched to Mandalgiri to apprehend the ring leaders. He was on the way joined by the loyal village headmen; during their march a few village chiefs who had joined Mandalgiri came to terms with the Government but when Mandalgiri was reached, it was found deserted while the whole village population had been taking shelter on the other side of the hill. After some negotiation conducted through other chiefs, a meeting was arranged with Sanja Nokma, a veteran leader who reported to Captain Williamson that the feuds not of recent origin centred round the question of possession over land. But Sanja Nokma did not report to Williamson for the second time at the next scheduled meeting when, therefore, the latter was compelled to set fire to the portion of the village where Sanja's residence was situated. Other villages which failed to co-operate were also punished. This incident took place in January 1869. In context of the prevailing situation, it would have been difficult to say which of the villages was at fault which thereby had been deserving such punishment. It was known that a few villages had entered protection with a view to escape the onslaught of the more war-like villages with which they had no good relations. But many more villages had acknowledged British protection agreeing to pay house tax and abide by other conditions.

The topographical conditions, the different patterns of village life and other factors necessitated the carrying out of a survey operation when the administration was confined in the hills. The boundary with Khasi and the Southern region needed a proper adjustment. In 1870 the survey expedition headed

by Major Austen and accompanied by Williamson was embarked on which was in position to explore the entire tract. During this operation many villages came to acknowledge the British authority although two villages showed sway of resistance; obstruction was also faced with from other smaller villages. Although they were suppressed, the surveying party had encountered great difficulties and had taken long time to deal with the resistance. Also it was known that many belligerent villages would not let other dependent villages remain in peace but the latter were subjected to many punitive measures taken by the former.

In the face of these problems, the Government was finally prone to consider the necessity of taking over the whole tract by enforcing a vigorous operation in order to demonstrate their power properly and compel all independent villages to enter administration. Towards the close of 1872, a joint operation under three columns from Mymensing side, Nibari Swar in Goalpara side and Tura itself were directed to march into the interior hills. The columns from Tura and Mymensing were successful which opened contacts with many new villages, the two columns met somewhere and coordinated their march to Rongrengiri; the third column met resistance on the way but the offending villages were subjugated. This joint operation finally regularised the establishment of the administration over the whole district and the Garo people, after five years of resistance, were made amenable to the British administration and so by the beginning of 1873, the whole district was consolidated. All the villages covered in these tripartite operations had come to profess their allegiance to Government, promise to pay tax, agree to submit to British courts and entertain police operations as and when necessary. Laskars were appointed over the newly administered villages.

Not to speak of the relations with the Garos which dated back to 1765, the Government, irrespective of difficulties encountered, properly and systematically accomplished the consolidation of this once known fabulous land of the Garos within a brief span of time. Perhaps the more homogeneous character of the race which we have dealt with, the accessible position of the tribe to which it had communications with both Assam and Bengal and the daily contacts which the tribe had with the neighbouring regions through trade links, etc., had been the important points for consideration.

On the other hand, Government was placed in a more difficult position to consolidate NEFA, Nagaland, etc., owing to the more complicated topographical confrontation of the land, the heterogeneous character of the race involved and other situations.

The consolidation over, other measures were taken to establish administration on a sure footing. The new Laskars were confirmed to their offices and their functions defined. Peace was established and normal administration took its course. Social changes, through various factors, permeated the Garo society. The Zamindari system was finally settled by which the system of handing over annual compensation was stopped and the Zamindars were paid on the perpetual basis.

The consolidation consummated in 1873 closed down the long-term Garo resistance to the annexation. It is not known whether any concomitant influence of the Great struggle in 1857 was felt among this people but as they were in close touch with their counterparts in Bangladesh and Assam, the possibility was not ruled out. As far as we know, the disgruntled elements in Jaintia, Cachar and Manipur were associated with the phases of the struggle at the instance of the Chittagong mutineers who travelled into these regions and mobilised some forces. From the tradition, we know that Nongjri in the Khasi Hills sided with the mutineers in Chatak and other neighbouring places. Rajendra, the deposed syiem of Jaintia, was suspected of having certain links with the mutineers and was kept under the guards at Sylhet in 1857.

All the previous raids did not centre round head-hunting propensity alone nor were they organised to prevent collection of revenue. They emerged also from the love of freedom imbibed in their hearts. The last five years saw them persisting in their struggle to preserve their age-old freedom in keeping with their noble traditions. Even before 1866, we find instances of their long persistence in the field. Kissogiri fought twice, so Daggal which held out for three times against the Government punitive expeditions and so did other villages. The last stand of the Garos was heroic and in pursuit of this aim, they sought to build up a solidarity to defend their liberty. Probably to many of them, the annexation came unnoticed while a larger portion had yet been won over to the side of the Government. From 1873 onwards, no more uprising had

taken place except in 1882 when some village people showed sway of resistance against the road construction but it was suppressed before it could fan out into a movement.

The administration became largely organised when the hills were pacified finally. In 1874 the District was attached to Assam over which the Chief Commissioner of Assam extended jurisdiction. Not only was it that the area of the new District had been finally demarcated from Goalpara, Khasi Hills and Mymensing but vital administrative arrangements were worked out. The consolidation was not easy at the mountain tract in which physical divisions are so formidable, the land covered for its greater portion with dense jungle, infested with wild animals. The earliest British administrators exerted tremendous pressure to establish administration with the help of Garo dependents and allies. A mixed pattern of polity was reported in areas contiguous to Khasi and Nongstoin State on the east. The hard labour paid well its dividends. The removal of claims of Sherpore and Sushang Zamindars seemed to have helped in mitigating complications and produced repercussions at a uniform level with a common system of taxation and revenue assessed though at little variance from place to place. To-day while the mouzahdars are responsible for revenue collection in the plains, in the hills it is a task performed by Laskars. The appointment of Laskars to the charge of village administration in secular assignment was a constructive measure which in turn can give the present District Council ample scope for carrying out measures in land tenure and other institutions.

The Deputy Commissioner enjoyed almost unlimited powers in the District. He was over-all in charge and was responsible to the Chief Commissioner of Assam from 1874 when the post of latter was constituted. In the same year Shillong became the capital of Assam. All civil and criminal cases beyond his power lay with the Chief Commissioner who exercised highest police powers. The Deputy Commissioner was provided a police force and he played vital role in extending the spheres of the Government through other departments such as public health, agriculture, veterinary and animal husbandary, census, P.W.D. which gradually were set up as small units. All cases from the village councils lay with him. By the Government of India Act, 1935 the Deputy Commissioner was directly responsible to the Governor of Assam in all

· matters. The District secured representation in the Assam Legislative Assembly since then.

Laskars conducted the village administration, settled cases, collected revenue and conveyed Government decisions and promulgations. They acted on behalf of the Deputy Commissioner. They furnished labourers and building materials as and when necessary in course of road-construction and other building works. In respect of police, rural police acted as and when directed by the Deputy Commissioner. Most of the powers of the Deputy Commissioner now have been taken over by the District Council by virtue of the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution of India.

The administration entailed enormous expenditure to consolidate the District. No doubt the previous punitive expeditions had taxed enormously upon the revenue of the country. When the District was consolidated, income to the Government was obtained from house tax, elephant mahals, forest levies in reserved forests. By the Act of 1869 the district was excluded from the jurisdiction of the civil, criminal and revenue courts and offices established under the general regulations and Acts which imbibed a distinct pattern for the district. The Regulation of 1876 banned entry of the outsiders into the district for trading purpose without obtaining the Government special permission with a view to extend protection to the indigenous people. The Inner Line Regulation which applied to modern Arunachal, Nagaland, Mizoram, however, was not imposed. The Chief Commissioner by the Regulation II of 1890 was entitled, of course with the concurrence of the Governor-General-in-Council, to rescind operation of any law in force in the District which enabled since 1884 the exclusion of the Civil and Criminal Procedure Code, court fees, stamps, transfer of property and registration to be held in abeyance although some of them were introduced in which the indigenous people were not directly related. The Code of Civil Procedure had not been extended to the district.<sup>1</sup>

Before the departure of the British Government, the political elites were concerned with new arrangement to be made in the new set up of the dominion. The Garo National

1. *Tribal Situation in India*, Indian Institute of Advanced Study, Simla, p. 515.

Council which had emerged, pivoted public opinion and negotiated in 1946-47 with the highest authorities that all powers of Government including taxation and administration be vested in the Legal Council and the only link proposed with the Provincial Government was in respect of a few subjects like higher education, medical aid, etc., other than the subjects of Defence, External Affairs, etc., which were not provincial subjects.<sup>1</sup>

To assess the conditions in Assam hills, a Sub-Committee of the Constituent Assembly was constituted with the Assam's Chief Minister, Mr. G. Bordoloi, as Chairman. One of its members was Mr. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy, a member of the Assam Cabinet who was returned from the Shillong constituency in the elections of 1946. He did the drafting of the Sixth Schedule which finally was approved by the Constituent Assembly. It was intended to provide District autonomy to Mizo Hills, Naga Hills, N. Cachar Hills, Mikir Hills, Garo Hills and U.K.J. Hills. In the last named district, it replaced the Khasi States Federation which acceded to the Dominion of India during the Interim period.

The coming of the District Council was a new landmark. The conditions for the working of a District Council seem to be more applicable to Garo elakaships than the Khasi States.<sup>2</sup>

### **Khasi-Jaintia**

About the 11th Century A. D. an Austric speaking race, the Mons captured power and ruled Burma for a few centuries. At the height of their power they were matrilineal combined with a matrilocal system. Sin Saw Ba, the great Mon empress, finds mention in the annals. Like the Garo, a sovereign was married to one of his wife's sisters to ensure the purity of blood. The Irrawady delta until comparatively recent times was a centre of their dispersal. Many stories told are of their wars with the Man (Burmese) which continued for a long time with alternative victories and defeats on both sides. The struggle finally ended in the Burmese victory. During the struggle, the Mons

1. *Meghalaya, Triumph of Tribal Genius*, ISSD, Delhi, p. 20.

2. Important aspects of administration by District Councils in the State are dealt with in Chapter X. K. Peter, *South-East Asia, Tribes, Minorities and Nations*, pp. 117-119.



retreated to various caves where they reorganised themselves and hid their art-treasures and literature. Having overran the Mons,<sup>1</sup> the Burmese found fields for exploits and conquered many peoples. It led to their invasion of Assam in which the East India Company was compelled to intervene. The Mon, Rieng Palaung and Wa in Burma are Mon-Khmer speaking. Khasi-Jaintia is a Mon-Khmer speech located in Meghalaya since time immemorial and survives as a solitary island in the midst of the Tibeto-Burman, Sino-Tibetan and Aryan groups of languages. It is supposed to be an offshoot from its cognate in the East. The division under this group is sevenfold—which are Bahnaric, Katuic, Khasi, Khmeric, Mon, North Laos and Palaungic.

Annamese is a Mon-Khmer speech with its age-old civilisation in Vietnam. Besides Khmer in Cambodia, there are Lemet-Khmu in Thailand, Bahnar, Stieng, Cham, Rade Jarai, and the other numerous dialectal groups in Cambodia, Laos and Indo-China. Khmer and stone using people in Indonesia are connected with megalithic culture just like Khasi. Sakai-Semang is a matrilineal tribe in Malaysia. All these languages fall within the Mon-Khmer group besides which they are related to Munda confined in Bihar and the neighbouring States in India; the linguistic resemblance is corroborated by megalithic rituals obtained from these people. In particular megalithic rituals and erections connected with funeral ceremonies among Khasis and Mundas are very striking, so much so, that it seems that they were all derived from a common substratum. Mon-Khmer and Munda groups belong to an Austric family, Austro-Asiatic stock.

Khasi-Jaintia has a number of dialects. The Cherra dialect (*Ktien sohra*) in view of its first contact with the Government as well as the first mission body, is the dialect used in literature and in schools. It is a medium of instruction in both Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts.

We have to deal briefly with the past history of the Khasis and Jaintias and the growth of kingdoms before the British came. We have dealt with polity in the previous chapter from a historical conception. All about history in details, moreover, may be had from a book entitled *History and Culture of the*

1. The Mons at present are actually indistinguishable from Burmese in Language and culture and many speak no longer their original language.

*Khasi People* and also other books included in our bibliography. The treatment in this context will be more sketchy. The history of the external relations, trade and social contacts are retrospective of the growth of modern transformation. External factors were largely decisive in many cases in the internal history.

The ancient kingdoms were mostly located at the neighbouring plains, viz. Nowgong and Kamrup and which stretched into the outer hills. Kamakhya was one of the oldest kingdoms with its headquarters near Gauhati. The tradition has it that it was jointly occupied by both Khasis and Garos after they had fought against their common enemy. It was here that both adopted a common matrilineal organisation. Later on it was abandoned and occupied by the Aryans who restored the worship of Kamakhya Devi after Ka Meikha said to be the ancient mother of the Khasis. Another ancient kingdom was Mairang in Kamrup District. One well known kingdom was Stri Rajya (Kingdom of women) over which Ka Urmi and Ka Urvara Rani ruled. The kingdom was exposed to the invasion of Laliditya, a great conqueror from Kashmir, but by a stratagem, his force was diverted and the kingdom was saved. It was located on the banks of Kolong (Kalanga) river just around its confluence with the Kupli where Khasi stones, menhirs and slabs are still to be seen at Neli in Nowgong. The kingdom which next came into being was Hidimba (after a Khasi word Hadem used to denote the tribes from North Cachar) and was identified with ancient Kapili kingdom after the Kupli river. Lt. Col. Allan Wilson refers to an ambassador named U Ai<sup>1</sup> from a copper-plate inscription, a small metals-lab, at Nowgong, deputed to China. The kings named U Chai and U Bnai ruled. Later on kings adopted the royal titles of *Moin* and *Manik* (which mean diamonds) which are still used by many of the present Khasi Syiems.

History later on became confined to the hills by which agriculture, industry and megalithic culture were re-vitalised in view of immense potentialities which the hills abound. This economic pattern comprised wet-rice cultivation, orchard plantation, cultivation of areca-nuts and betelvines along with iron-smelting and excavation of other metals. The people spread

1. *Journal of Assam Research Society*, Vol. II, October 1938 and January 1939), No. 3-4, p. 57.

into different regions. The various rock-traps for iron-smelting and megalithic culture, groves and river banks were occupied which later on were consolidated into various kingdoms. The oldest kingdoms were Bhoi on the north which in course of time were absorbed into the powerful kingdoms that sprang on the central plateau. The most renowned kingdom was Malngiang whose kings Mailong and Kyllong Rajahs were not only conquerors but veterans in horse and elephant riding. They built up great markets and patronised art and sculpture. Ruins of their ancient headquarters can still be seen along the Shillong-Jowai road on the Khyrim-Jaintia border. Later on it was replaced by Jaintia and Shillong or Nongkseh kingdoms and many kingdoms in course of time emerged on the mid-west, western and southern extremity. The founder of Jaintia syiemship was believed to be a nymph which was caught by U Loh Ryndi from the Wai khyrwi stream in the form of a fish. The syiem family is called Sutnga and Nartiang was the first headquarters in the hills. Shillong, later on split into Khyrim and Myllem syiemships, was founded by a cave woman caught from a cave by a man from the Myllem Ngap clan by alluring her with flowers from the entrance to the cave. Ka Pah Syntiew, the maiden of that cave, was no other than the daughter of the Shillong god himself.

The Jaintia Syiems later on conquered Jaintiapur. Their kingdom extended to Dooputty and Saddlar in Cachar District and comprised the north bank of Surma river and an area called the *land of seven reaches* south of that river. Jaintiapur became the capital of the kingdom where rows of Khasi menhirs, slabs, cromlechs, fortresses, and other specimens of architecture may still be seen. In the Brahmaputra valley, it comprised Neli, Gobha, Sahari and a portion of Desh Dimura. Afterwards, kings who stayed at Jaintiapur, became partially Hinduised but many of tribal laws and customs, matrilineal laws of inheritance, megalithic erections were retained.

The partition of Shillong kingdom into Myllem and Khyrim became recognised shortly after the British administration was established. The great part of Shillong, the present twin capital of Assam and Meghalaya, headquarters of Arunachal administration and the North-Eastern Council is territorially located in Myllem State. Both these syiemships comprised vast areas north and south but Khyrim State has its jurisdiction

extended to the southern extremity. While Myllem State has more administrative concerns, the Khyrim has more cultural role as mentioned earlier. In 1825 the Burmese during their invasion of western Assam occupied Desh Dimurua at Nowgong previously held by the Myllem Rajah as fief from the Ahom kings on return of 30 katra rupees, the former managing the affairs through a feudatory Rajah with six sardars where the annual tribute paid to the Myllem Rajah, totalled Rs. 1,100 with 60 bullocks and 20 he-goats.<sup>1</sup> Another mouzadar of Myllem State looked after Mehal, Khrija Mouza and Nomeah in Kamrup. The Syiems of Jaintia and Shillong had cultivated trade and other relations with the Kacharis and Ahoms. Once Jaintia was invaded by the Ahoms as a border skirmish but no permanent annexation had taken place. Other western, mid-western and southern kingdoms had extended into Mymensing.

Nongkhlaw syiems were akin to Sutnga Syiems. Nongkhlaw stretched in its territory from Badwar in Kamrup to Dewanganj in Sylhet. They were powerful syiems. U Tirot Singh, now recognised as one of the martyrs in the national freedom movement of India, belonged to that State. Shella in the past had diplomatic as well as kinship ties with Nongkhlaw before it became independent. Mawsmal, another kingdom in the south, seceded from the Cherra kingdom at one time, resulting from a war of succession, but just before the coming of the British, it was united to the parent kingdom. Shella held many villages on the foothills and contiguous plain area in modern Bangladesh. Mawsmal also held Angajur and Fahtepur in Sylhet plains obtained as gift from Jaintia. Nongstoin was another big kingdom in which Khasi, Diko and Lyngngam groups were comprised. Later on Syiems at Shella were replaced by Wahdadars who made many raids into the plains. The other kingdoms were Maram, Mawiang, Mawsynram, Rambrai, Myriaw, Nongspung, Langrin, Nongsohphoh, Malai Sohmat and Bhowal. The two syiemships which lapsed under the British arrangement were Nongwah and Jaintia. The former was constituted in Desh Rane in Kamrup and the adjoining hills. It was annexed into Kamrup. Jirang was originally a Syiemship which was transformed into a Sirdarship during the British rule and shortly after Independence, it was changed again into Syiemship. From 1817 to 1822, Nongstoin and Langrin.

1. Barpujari, *Problem of Hill Tribes*, pp. 86-89 and 196-197.

Syiems quarrelled among themselves with regard to jurisdiction over Laur in Sylhet plains over which the Langrin king had granted to the Inglis company a ten-year lease for the excavation of limestones. All the other areas such as Mawrapoor, Bardwar, Pantan, Boko, Bongong and other nearby areas in Kamrup were held by the Khasis. Some of them were confirmed by the Burmese and the others were left unadministered during the brief Burmese temporary occupation.<sup>1</sup>

Many conflicts were recorded since the East India Company was established at Sylhet from 1765. The earliest known conflict occurred in March 1772 when a punitive expedition was despatched by the East India Company in co-ordination with the Sylhet Collectorate into Jaintiapur in consequence of the raids perpetrated by the Jaintias in plundering the boats laden with merchandise on the Surma. The engagement, however, was localised in Jaintiapur and no advance was made into the hills. The Jaintia syiem was forced to pay an indemnity of Rs. 15,000 and promised not to obstruct passage in future to boatmen. The outcome of the invasion, however, was important leading to a survey of the boundaries. In the winter of 1783 the Shella people raided the plains and sacked a market of Ishamati. The Sirdars of 137 villages at the Sylhet plains perpetrated outrageous raids amongst their neighbours. U Buh Singh, Syiem of Mawsmat, was known to have conducted such raids from time to time. In 1795 another conflict occurred. Almost all the southern Khasis repeated such raids on the eve of the British advent. They played fears upon the local zamindars who were faced with various difficulties to rendering regular revenue to the Government. Some of the villages were, of course, taken on rent by the Khasis from the zamindars but the rent was hardly returned. These events greatly complicated the administrative machinery of the Government. In consequence of the Burmese invasion, the Jaintia Syiem, U Ram Singh was compelled to enter the protection of the East India Company and agreed to furnish military assistance to them in the event of a war breaking out with any of their enemies. Some trade relations were stipulated in the treaty. The Jaintia syiem allowed a construction of road by the Company through his kingdom. In consequence of this treaty held in 1824, a road was built from Nowgong District to Jaintiapur and David Scott once

1. Barpujari, *Problem of Hill Tribes*, pp. 193-195.

travelled on this road. In the meantime, Scott also closed the dwars to Khasi traders which had caused many difficulties and was bent upon annexing Bardwar in the plains which belonged to Nongkhlaw State. Of course he agreed to restore Bardwar and open the dwars provided Tirot Singh, the Syiem of Nongkhlaw, would agree to allow the East India Company to construct a road through the kingdom to connect Gauhati and Sylhet. Tirot Singh in April 1826 convened a State Durbar in which almost all the males in the kingdom attended. To it came also the neighbouring Syiems to consider the issue. David Scott also came up and was present at the Durbar. The Durbar against the teeth of opposition expressed by orators and spokesmen from different villages, decided to approve the construction of the road and a treaty was conducted where terms and conditions similar to those of Jaintia were stipulated. Many people returned home dissatisfied over the approval conveyed. The villages of Nongbri under Tirot Singh challenged the treaty and threatened to veto it as no representative from it had been invited to the Durbar.

In consequence of the above treaty concluded with Nongkhlaw, construction of the road immediately commenced and enormous progress was made within a short time. English officers, Lieutenants Beddingfield and Burlton, posted at Nongkhlaw, supervised the construction with the assistance of local people who furnished building materials and provided labourers as necessary. However many unpleasant relations cropped up which led to the outbreak of the war. There were other antecedents. A beloved ally and companion of Tirot Singh, U Bor Manick, Syiem of Myllem, had quarrelled with the authorities of the East India Company as regards jurisdiction and authority over Desh Dimurua and in March 1828, he marched down to the dwars where he seized the revenue from the revenue officers posted by the Government. Similarly, Tirot Singh had disputed with David Scott with regard to jurisdiction over Bardwar in which Mr. Scott had proposed to restore it to the Nongkhlaw Syiem which from time immemorial was comprised within Nongkhlaw. Thus Tirot Singh announced to the Government revenue superintendent at Bardwar:<sup>1</sup> 'Mr. Scott made friendship with me previously saying your enemy is Company's enemy and that he would relinquish the Bardwar revenue, both in

1. Barpujari, *Problem of Hill Tribes*, pp. 49-50.

money and pikes. He has not done it and has the wish to give troops to my enemy'. Tirot Singh was disgusted with the refusal of the Company to furnish him military assistance against the Nongwah Syiem (Rani king), Bolaram against whom Tirot and Bor Manick had made a common stand. These circumstances led to the outbreak of the war which raged from 1829 upto 1833.

The war was started by the massacre of Lieutenants Burlton and Baddingfield. The latter was the first victim, being treacherously murdered at the Nongkhlaw Durbar to which he was invited in April, 1829. Burlton with his sepoy had escaped and made good by fleeing to Kamrup but were besieged on their way and put to death at the foothills. David Scott who was at Nongkhlaw miraculously escaped on being informed at the dead of night by Ka Ksan, mother of Tirot Singh. A very deep friendship and acquaintance had grown between them. He fled to Cherrapunji, having received help from the Mawphlang Lyngdoh, who escorted him, and was rescued by U Duwan Singh, Syiem of Cherra (Sohra). Meanwhile Tirot Singh had organised a strong defensive and offensive alliance in which many great contemporary Syiems, U Muken of Mawsmmai, U Suk Syiem of Sohbar, U Ador Syiem of Mawsynram, U Phar of Bhowal, U Ksan of Malai Sohmat, besides Bor Manick, joined. The four Shella Sahdadars, U Mishmi U, Ksan, U Sumer and U Bir Singh also sided with him. U Duwan sided with the British having suffered from the Wahdadars and the Mawmluh Syiem, vicegerent of Nongkhlaw in his vicinity. U Tirot Singh later on had contrived a plot to overthrow the British supremacy in North-eastern India and was seeking to secure adherences from his neighbours, Assamese, Garo, Boro, Singpho and even Tibetan. The battle during the first year was a conventional strategy.

Mr. Scott immediately sent message to Sylhet from Cherra and troops of the Sylhet Light Infantry were immediately despatched to rescue him and reinstitute British force in the hills. In the meantime, the advance of troops from Gauhati was obstructed whereas other disturbances flared up in the neighbouring plains of Kamrup. Capt. Lister from Sylhet covered up the marches very rapidly. Duwan Singh now guided the troops into the neighbouring villages which had harboured the warriors. Thus the battle started.

With the vigorous operation of the troops, many strongholds were stormed and principalities on the south were brought to terms with the Government. Cherra became a base of military operations resulting from a treaty in which Duwan handed over plots of land at Cherrapunji in exchange with those located in the plains. Within one year, many treaties were accepted by the southern States such as the Wahdadars of Shella (on September 3, 1829), Lar Singh of Myriaw (on September 12, 1829), Jibor of Rambrai (on October 17, 1829), Sirdar of Mawdon (in November 1829), Sirdars of Nongshken, Nongjrong and Sohbar villages and Bor Manick of Myllem (January, 1830). According to the treaties, the syiems and their Durbars were allowed to settle cases except murder which had to be transferred to the Agent to the Governor-General with his headquarters at Cherrapunji, the syiems were required to grant passage to the troops and Government personnel across their kingdoms; in some cases, they were required to hand over limestone quarries to the Government on lease on the basis of returning half the dividend accruing from trade. Further, the belligerent States were imposed fines and in default, the Company took away some villages from their hold converted into British areas, discernible from States. Some strips of territories were merged into the neighbouring plains. Rambrai and Myllem had to bear the brunt of the heaviest punishment in this respect.

Except Cherra, Langrin, Nongstoin, Nongspung and Khyrim classed as Independent, other states were treated as semi-Independent but in subsequent years, the distinction was done away with.

Back to 1829, we dilate briefly on certain events. Whereas the heads of States were curtailed, the large masses of people, on the other hand, connived with U Tirot Singh in the field which led to the murder of Jibor, Syiem of Rambrai for having accepted such conditions. Other States had furnished support to Tirot Singh with weapons, arms and men. Meanwhile Lister marched to Nongkhlaw and subdued those villages which were open enemy of the Company. At Nongkhlaw, he met a stubborn resistance in which many ladies joined the warriors and fought with the troops. Meanwhile in May 1829, Lieutenant Vetch arrived at Nongkhlaw from Gauhati. Then followed the arrival of many more troops to deal with the insurgency staged by the hill men. Tirot Singh had sent messages to



various places in North-eastern India and received valuable assistance from Rajah Chandra Kanta, the deposed Ahom and many parties.<sup>1</sup> With the Garos, a joint defensive alliance was pledged in which the latter took up their respective sphere. Finally Nongkhlaw fell. And Tirot Singh was urged to accept the terms by which he would be restored. He rejected them.

Tirot Singh conducted guerrilla operations and held the field up-till his fall in 1833. U Monbhut, Lorshon and Khein were engaged to organising the warfare. Many stories told of Monbhut of great physical prowess who covered up long marches and fields in a day; Rambrai, Nongkhlaw, Myllem and other States, poured batch after batch of men drilled and trained. In spite of such hindrances put to the Government, it was a paradox that Bor Manick was capitulated in 1830 in which he was detained. A Treaty was imposed upon him in which afterwards he was released. Tradition has it that afterwards he fled to Tibet with hundreds of his followers. Since his capture, Singh Manick took over charge of Khyrim and Hajar Singh of Myllem, the two daughter states of Shillong. The guerrilla warfare was continued against various hindrances. The Government blockaded the hills and resorted to meting out punishment by burning many villages to the ground. With Duffa Gam, the Singpho chieftain, arrangement was made to divide the respective spheres with a view to jeopardise Government position in the hills. Tirot Singh was camped at the cave in the Diengiei peak. Rambrai made desperate stand to the last, when during 1830 and 1831 warriors of the State, on various occasions, marched down to the plains and destroyed the Company's posts. At the height of these battles, David Scott died in August 1831. Even then many allies of Tirot Singh forsook him before the war concluded. On the other hand, the allies of the Government failed to check up communication between their people and Tirot Singh's agents. In 1832, the Supreme authority from Fort William, Calcutta, directed the Agent to adopt conciliatory methods and to declare amnesty to those who would submit. It was Singh Manick of Khyrim who at the last stage played the part of a mediator between the Company and U Tirot Singh. During the suspensions of the operations, Tirot Singh appeared before Lister,

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1. Garo and Khasi messengers who bore Tirot Singh's letters to Rajah Chandra Kanta were intercepted.

Retherford and Ensign Brodie in September 1832 who assured to restore him provided he would agree to the terms and conditions. Tirot Singh demanded the abandonment of the road through his kingdom. Nothing came out. These negotiations dragged during August and September, 1832. The British offered the throne to Jidor Singh, Tirot Singh's legitimate heir, but he rejected so long a legitimate Syiem was there. However during an armistice on January 13, 1833 Tirot Singh was handed over to Captain H. Inglis. He was deported to Dacca. From Dacca he was once recalled to Nongkhlaw but he rejected because he desired 'to die in a prison like a king than sit on the throne as a slave'. Not long after, he passed away.

Small States such as Mawsynram, Bhowal and Malai-Sohmat in 1831-32 were also impelled to recognise the British paramountcy and accept the treaty imposed on them. But U Sngap Syiem of Maram prolonged the war to 1838. It was vigorously fought from 1835-1839. The war was waged because he refused to return the revenue from the plains dominion in Sylhet to the Government. U Phan Maram, U Tep Shiak and U Moit Kliaw, who commanded, held the field for long. But Maram was small and less resourceful. Nongnah, a stockaded village, remained unstormed as the three stockades were guarded day and night. But the soldiers later on learnt of an exit which was unguarded and got into it at night. Thus Maram fell and a treaty was imposed.

The British creation of non-States was another characteristic of annexation, each placed under the headman whose appointment was confirmed by the Agent. They were directly responsible to him. These villages returned the annual house tax or land revenue in lieu of the former to the authorities. When Jaintia Hills were converted into British area in 1835, the Dalois, heads of elakas, were reduced to the position of petty chiefs as in the case of the other British areas in the District. The Dalois and village headmen like Laskars could levy fines upto Rs. 50 only and settle cases within the limited powers prescribed to them.

While the annexation of Khasi Hills was completed in 1839, the Jaintia Hills came under British occupation in 1835. Rajendra Singh, successor of Ram Singh, the King of Jaintia, failed to comply with some additional demands of the Government to whom he refused to pay a tribute of Rs. 10,000 in

exchange for the protection conferred by the East India Company upon his kingdom; he also challenged the right of the Company to raise a new *Chokey* ghat at Chuppermukh in Nowgong, the boundary of his kingdom. Moreover, he failed to produce the culprits who kidnapped and killed three British subjects who were sacrificed at the altar of the Kali goddess in Jaintiapur. For these reasons the ancient Jaintia kingdom was annexed to the East India Company's dominion in 1835. The Viceroy at first announced to Rajendra that the Government had in mind the scheme of annexing the plain portions of Jaintia kingdom located in Cachar, Sylhet and Nowgong but Rajendra was not gratified with partial hold of the hills and rejected it outright. Some think that his rejection amounted to his true patriotic inclination while others suggest that he considered the hills of smaller importance as in the hills, he could not exercise full authority whereas all the plains portion were counted as his personal property over which he exercised his power just like a Zamindar and drawing direct revenue from the vart estates. When the proposal was rejected, the Government took the entire kingdom and since then, Jaintia Hills was classed as the British Area along with the petty villages wrested from their parent Syiemships. Dalois were still retained as the autonomous local heads.

The kingdom was sliced into the neighbouring districts, Jaintiapur and the 24 Jaintia Parganahs located in Sylhet and extending to Bodarpur were integrated into the Districts in that region whereas Chuppermukh was taken into Nowgong and the rest of the dominions in the hills was integrated into the Khasi District.

The order of annexation was promulgated on February 23, 1835 and in consequence of it, Jaintiapur was occupied, lots of gold and precious ornaments in the place were taken away; but the Pnars and all groups of Jaintia Highlanders were not silent at this sudden turn which occurred in their land. They staged an insurrection in which the regiments of the Company were moved into the hills to suppress the revolt. The insurrection was badly organised and therefore collapsed within a few months. The Pnars resented that their State was not given an equal status with the Khasi States. The administration in the hills was soon organised.

In 1857-58, the Government imposed a house tax in Jaintia Hills. At the same time, many crown-lands were taken away by the administration. The Government further discontinued the previous system of accepting the he-goats surrendered by the villages due previously to the Syiem's court as the annual offering to the State festivals but preferred a house tax with a view to increase their income. However, the people were yet unaccustomed to paying taxes and so took the order as a challenge to their custom, but in fact, the revolt which was then organised, was aimed at the restoration of the ancient Independence. Their position was weakened by the non-availability of help from their neighbours. In March and April, 1860 in which dates the revolt took place, the Pnars caused untold troubles to the Government and poured down towards Jaintiapur where police stations located there were burnt, troops brought from Dacca, Sylhet and other places being engaged to quell the revolt. However, within two months, the rebellion was completely suppressed. The revolt suppressed, the police station at Jowai was re-established and a military guard was stationed. Government officials were directed to confiscate the weapons of the people and other police measures were adopted to wipe out all signs of unrest. Khasi iron-smelting, according to a tradition, was replaced by cheaper iron from the plains so that production of arms and weapons would become mitigated. The measures caused more hostility to the Government and brought about the outbreak of the final Anglo-Jaintia War (1861-63). In consequence of the suspicion that Rajendra had a hand in the matter since 1857, when he was incited by the mutineers from Chittagong, who had penetrated Jaintia and Manipur, the Government deported him to Dacca where he died in 1861. All these measures caused resentment in the minds of the Khasis and Pnars.

In December 1861, the final revolt broke out. The immediate cause was due to police interference in the dancing festival of the people of Jalong on 28 and 29 of that month. The Police from Jowai attended the festival and confiscated home-made weapons used during the ceremony. In these circumstances, the people of Jowai resolved to stage an insurrection and sought to furnish adequate strength in the field to cope with. Secret societies of Pnars were formed, Durbars were held all over the country and warriors were enlisted. Black-smithies were requisitioned for the production of several

kinds of weapons, caves for sheltering weak women and children were prepared, granaries were kept ready and stockades were raised. The foremost leader was U Kiang Nongbah who hailed from Jowai. The Pnars at first operated against the military station but it was relieved by a garrison despatched from Cherra.

Thus the famous Anglo-Jaintia war started. The movement aimed at the attainment of full freedom. The Daloi conducted a large scale operation and the struggle took a serious turn. It continued for two years. Insurrectionary leaders were Giri Daloi of Shangpung, Bang Daloi of Nartiang, Suwar Daloi of Sutnga and many others. Other rebel leaders were Manick, Ex-Daloi from Jowai, Kiang Pator, Khro Kmah Longlah and other residents from Jowai. Other veterans from Amwi in the south, Bhoi in the North and people in the eastern region threw solid support to U Kiang Nongbah. The other names in the annals are Kma Lyngdoh and Shan Lalu of Jalong, U Smon, U Long Lyngdoh of Shangpung, U Os Daloi of Mynso, U Sati of Nongjngi, Shai Daloi of Barato and many others. Terrorist methods were adopted to enlist people to the insurrectionist and violent measures were taken. Military centres were stationed at different places; Morton's regiment was stationed at Nartiang and Andrews was placed at Nangjngi. Regiments were brought from many military centres in view of the protracted warfare. Richardson, during the first stage, had distinguished himself in capturing many Khasi posts and locations. Yet the Pnars showed no sign of submission. They resorted to bellicose steps to harass the Government. All the warriors left their homes and were camped in the desolate jungles from where they operated against Government troops and mobilised their force with lightning speed. In the middle of March 1862, General G.B. Showers proclaimed an amnesty to those who would submit but warned that the British Government would inflict severe penalty upon those who were associated with the rebels.

The proclamation had no great effect. The Pnars became more stubborn, the war dragged on for months and no pacification seemed possible. Both sides lost a good number of men. Among the Pnars, the most prominent chief who fell down was U Giri, Daloi of Shangpung. The Government even employed the Syiems of Sohra and Khyrim to negotiate with

the Pnars in seeking a solution for terminating the wretched warfare and settle the differences in other ways. The Pnars responded that they would have nothing short of Independence.

In border areas, the Pnars adopted violent methods and from January to May 1862, campaigns were conducted into Nowgong and North Cachar Hills when villages were looted, causing great disturbances to the administration. Hundreds of warriors would appear without warning and terrify the inhabitants. However with the arrival of the regiments under Captain Scott and Lieutenant Inglis, they were forced to retreat with some casualties. Rebels found shelter in many places as a large section of the population had not been prepared to remain subdued, but elsewhere, loyal subjects lived in dismay and anxiety, as they had to comply with the demands for money and food-stuffs at the point of the bayonet and sword. Their life hung in danger.

Like U Tirot Singh, U Kiang Nongbah was captured through treachery. It is said U Long Sutnga, and U Bur Daloi on offers of money (which amounted to Rs. 1,000), gave information to the troops about U Kiang's hide-out at Umkarai village (Nartiang Daloiship). There U Kiang who was alone in his solitary residence owing to illness, was surprised by the soldiers (commanded by Lieutenant Sadlier). U Kiang tried to fire them with a pistol but the weapon misfired and he was pounced upon and seized. He was thus arrested and taken to Jowai by devious paths in the cover of the night, and at Jowai he was tried and found guilty by the authorities. Kiang gave a brave response that he had incited the people because of the Government's interference in their religious customs and for imposing many conditions which they were not prepared to accept. He was hanged on December 30, 1862, at the market in the heart of Jowai. Mounting up the scaffold, U Kiang made the following unforgettable dying words: "If my face turns towards the East when I die, the country will become free again, but the reverse shall happen when my face turns to the West" and when he died, it faced towards the East. Among those dead were Giri, Suwar, Mon and at Daloi of Nartiang. The majority of residents shortly after the fall of U Kiang Nongbah came to submit. Yet it was not until November 1863, that the last of the rebels (*viz.*, U Myllon Daloi of Mynso, U Kiang pator of Shangpung and Bukher of Raliang) came out to tender their

submission. Rabon Syiem of Khyrim played a role to pacify them. The glorious chapter of history came to its close but time will not permit it to fade into oblivion. It will be read again and again in which the Jaintias played their role in the freedom-struggle of India.

This was the last but the most impressive and memorable revolt. Indeed the Government was confronted with great hardships (at the cost of the loss of men and resources) in coping with the Khasi and Pnar insurgence. The task of annexing these hills was not easy as it had been in many other places. The outbreak from 1829 to 1863 (and with them, the people's sacrifice of lives and property), show that the Khasis were ever concerned with preserving their freedom and retaining their time-honoured institutions and traditions. It was too early for the Pnars and the Khasis to adapt themselves to the transformation visiting the country through the foreign administration. The change should come from within through the zeal and enthusiasm to reform, re-orient and transform their institutions and not from outside since it tended to be artificial. Kiang Nongbah was a true positivist and mature diplomat and exerted his pressure to turn the movement with the positive goals. Both Tirot Singh and U Kiang Nongbah had many sided qualities which like jewels, shed lustre to their land during the gloomiest hour and channelised national consciousness into a definite objective which speak to the world that Meghalaya (Garo Hills included in the personage of Sanja Nokma) has its rightful place in India's freedom struggle.

With the annexation of these hills, the people lost not only their ancient freedom but also unfortunately their fine traditions and noble institutions. The present transformation, no doubt, has both its good and bad aspects. Shortly after this upsurge had passed away, Jaintia Hills was consolidated into a Sub-division in the charge of a Sub-Divisional Officer and the allegiance of the Dalois was directed to him. He was responsible to the Deputy Commissioner stationed at Shillong for all his actions. Appeals from him lay with the Deputy Commissioner. A more definite pattern of administrative control was emphasised and the house tax and land revenue imposed were paid punctually, whereas other conciliatory steps were adopted.

Since 1858-59, sunnads were replaced for the old treaties conducted with the Independent and Semi-Independent States. In the arrangement in 1875, additional provisions were laid down in the treaties which sought to establish Government rights to rent lands for the purpose of road-constructions, raising of military and civil sanitararia and acquiring mineral rights on condition that the dividends were shared among the States and the Government. The Syiem enjoyed, under the provisions, judicial powers except death sentence, exile, murder and more than five years' imprisonment.

In 1864 the headquarters from Cherrapunji were transferred to Shillong after Mile, the Syiem of Myllem, leased out certain plots in the Shillong Town while a proportion of land needed for Government buildings was taken from private holders on rent. In 1940, the area ceded to the Government of Assam either partially or in full was described to comprise Shillong Rifle Range and Shillong (Umlong) Cantonment. But by another arrangement, the Municipal area as formed part of Myllem State was, for the purpose of administration, under the Assam Government. (*File No. 6, 1940 Pol. Dept.*).

The Deputy Commissioner enjoyed almost unlimited powers in matters relating both to Khasi States and British Areas and was vested with the authority to extend Acts and other laws in the District although a few of them were not accepted. He was vested with collectorate, executive, magisterial and police functions. Most of his proposals with regard to new developments were initiated by him for approval or modification of the higher authority like the Chief Commissioner of Assam and the Governor later on. The police force acted in co-ordination with his advice and recommendation.

Some political parties played a role, seeking to augment the position of the States in their relations with the Government. The Khasi National Durbar was one of such parties which from inception did some work until it was merged into the Eastern Tribal Union in 1955. The Durbar tried to lay down rules for the codification of the diverse customs, land tenure and laws of inheritance obtained from the different States but it was not a success. The Durbar put forward a proposal for an amendment in the treaties and the abrogation of some additional clauses in the sunnads but that too was not accepted. It pressed the Government to transfer some political



powers from the Deputy Commissioner to the State authorities but the Government did not work out any change in that line. With the enforcement of the Money-Minto reforms in 1919, the Khasis got one member to represent them in the Governor's Council of Assam but the electoral constituency was confined only to those residing in Shillong's Municipal Area. It was in 1927-28 that the public representation for reserving three seats from the District in the Governor's Constituency was entertained by the Simon Commission but the electors comprised only the British Areas including the Jowai Sub-Division and Shillong Municipality in the District. A lady, the late Miss Mevis Dunn Lyngdoh elected from a women's constituency was the first woman minister in the Saadullah Coalition Ministry. The Commission, on the representation again excluded non-State areas from the excluded areas entitled to the Naga and Lushai Hills Districts of that time.

In 1932 the Khasi States' Federation was formed; its objective was to act as a representative and administrative organ of the Khasi States in the Federation and put forward a claim for securing greater judicial power. It urged on the transference of some departments from the Deputy Commissioner to its own management. It also insisted on its position as the spokesman for the Khasi States that when any alteration of policy and administration was planned, it should be consulted. This point was pressed when a deputation from the party met Lord Wellington, the Viceroy of India, on the occasion of his visit to Shillong in 1933. The Viceroy felt that when many changes had been brought upon to bear on many so-called Indian Native States, the Khasi States still held the ground and carried out many of the important functions in the spirit of their customary laws. But a few enlightened people, even at that time, took to consideration that there should be certain scope of compromise between modernity and traditionality and that a field should open that there should be some progressive efforts for expediting important reforms which should discard wrong points in the traditions, preserve good ones and introduce such administrative measures causing an all-round advancement especially in the field of Municipal administration, higher and College Education, Public Health, Transport and Industry, Agricultural improvement, not yet accepted as new concepts of the day. In complete adherence to the traditional and customary laws, some de-merits were noticed such as the in-

tricate laws of succession to offices and others. It appears even to-day that such condition still continues since the scope to conciliate the concepts of modernity and traditional impact has been limited in this respect.

In the thirties, there was a struggle of the Khasis to secure a seat in the Chamber of Princess in India which the Government however did not entertain. These constitutional failures evolved largely from the conditions in the States, which on careful examination, were found that the claims could not qualify to get their demand fulfilled yet.

On the eve of the British departure, the country became hectic as to the constitutional adjustment that should serve best for the people. In 1944 at the First Hills Youth Union comprised with representatives from Naga, Lushai, Garo and Khasi communities, public attention was focussed to the need of evolving a separate pattern of administration for the Assam tribals in the new constitutional set up. Later on, a few Ahoms joined when the said Union adopted the title of the *Hills and Tribes' Conference*. But soon it died down when during the election issue in 1946, misunderstanding cropped in as to the choice of an election ticket by one candidate.

The Interim period in India was eventful for during that time, the Khasi States' Federation managed the affairs of the States, according to the powers derived from the Instrument of Accession and Annexed Agreement signed with the Dominion Government. The party supporting this Institution was the Khasi States People's Union. Important portfolios of administration were opened excluding those which vested on the Dominion Legislature whereas other concurrent matters fell under the conjoint control of the Federation and either the Dominion or the Government of Assam. When the Federation was set up, the point was also pressed that British Areas be merged into their respective parent States or assign them a separate State status. The Court of the Federation was set up which was to be the highest authority in respect of customary law, whereas in appeals not concerned with customary law, the Assam High Court would have appellate jurisdiction. This Court was even empowered to pass death sentence, transportation and life-imprisonment, subject to the revision and confirmation of the High Court of Assam. Its subordinate courts were given powers not exceeding those of a Magistrate

of the First Class as defined in the Code of Criminal Procedure. No appeal was recommended to lie against imprisonment less than three years. But since 1937 and earlier, a Syiem's Court was empowered to deal only with cases arising within his jurisdiction, between Khasis only, while over non-Khasis, the jurisdiction of the Assistant to the Deputy Commissioner extended. Concessions however were allowed to the Khasi Syiem to deal with such cases when both parties willingly submitted to the arbitration of the Syiem's Court. Appeals were recommended to lie with the Deputy Commissioner in civil cases.

The Khasi-Jaintia National Conference, however, was opposed to the continuance of the Federation and came forward with the plan for the Autonomous District Council in the regular set up; agitations of the two parties filled up the constitutional forums although during the last stage.

Rev. Nichols-Roy, Minister in Assam, faced adverse reaction from the Khasi States' People Union. During the plebiscites held in 1948, the latter swept the polls and during the Khasi Constitution making Durbar, it won the majority of members present that the Federation should continue. However during the final arrangement, the Sixth Schedule was applied to both States and British Area.

The Jaintia Durbar was a principal party in Jaintia Hills. It arranged the sending of a member to the Assam Legislative party. The Khasi National Durbar was merged into the Tribal Union in 1955 and more recently, the Jaintia Durbar was also merged into the APHLC.

## **NEW TRENDS AND FORUMS**

New elements of consciousness for tribal solidarity than individual existence had taken roots, during the first decade of Independence, in which history became an integrated one among the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia people.

Agitations for the Hill State climaxed in 1954-55 when the States Re-organisation Commission visited, on which occasion the Hills Union and other parties, submitted their respective memoranda in favour of Hill State. However, Hill State movement started to gain ground in 1954, during the joint conference of the Executive Councils of Autonomous Hills districts held at Tura in June 1954, when the need was envisaged for a Hill State to preserve the racial, linguistic and cultural identity of the Hill people. At the Conference, the representatives of Mizo Union and Cachar Hills, favoured the amendment of the Sixth Schedule. Memoranda from other parties, viz., the Hills Union, the Khasi National Durbar, United Mizo Freedom Organisation submitted to the States Re-organisation Commission, also insisted on the carving of a separate State. Yet it was an agitational than a realistic approach. It was left to the late Rev. J.J.M. Nichols-Roy to make a more realistic approach in his memorandum which contained a detailed plan.

The set-up proposed by him envisaged an easier implementation of development plans in a more economical and effective manner. He also ruled out any emergence of tribal rivalry owing to the cultural identity of different tribes. Communications could be more accessible by cutting a road *via* North Cachar and western part of Manipur to give Mizo Hills a link. The Assamese people relieved of the Hills, Nichols-Roy argued,

would be in a position to build up their administration speedily for their own benefit.

The Legislative Assembly of 25 Members, he pointed out, would be enough but the Cabinet could be enlarged so as to include one Member from each District. During the Interim arrangements, Shillong would continue to be the headquarters of both the States until Assam was ready to build her own headquarters.

The States Re-organisation Commission did not entertain the view expressed by the various parties, but the stone had gathered moss and Hill State movement had been rallying public support. Nichols-Roy soon resigned from the Congress and was returned during the 1957 election as an Independent candidate in the Assam Legislature whereas all the autonomous Hill District Councils were dominated by pro-Hill State parties. The Tribal Union became the representative party of the Hill people which captured many seats in both the State Legislature and the District Councils. One M.P. from Khasi and Jaintia, North Cachar and Mikir Hills Districts was returned on the Party's ticket. An English weekly, *Hills Chronicle* in circulation, during this time, expressed the Hills' grievances. But from that time onward, the move for recognition of Assamese had gathered strength, so that the tribal Union renamed Eastern India Tribal Union would have withdrawn co-operation with the Assam Government but, for conciliation secured at the instance of Pandit Pant, Union Home Minister under which condition, a portfolio of Tribal Areas Department was given to Capt. W. A. Sangma in the Assam Cabinet.

It was at the beginning of 1960 that the move to recognise Assamese as State language had become stronger. Then in the summer of that year, occurred the unhappy language riots, although Shillong was, however, free from major incidents which took violence in the plains. On this occasion, the Hill people realising the implication of the proposed Bill rose unitedly and their leaders expressed fear that the passing of the Bill would—(a) place the Assamese people in a more dominant position which would lead to the assimilation of all the Hill peoples into the Assamese community, and might disintegrate their identity altogether as has given protection for in the Constitution, (b) over-burden the Hill people with too many languages, (c) adversely affect the prospects and opportunities

of the Hill people in Government services notwithstanding safeguards, (d) discriminate the non-Assamese as less than 50 per cent have had Assamese as their mother tongue. The All Party Hill Leaders' Conference<sup>1</sup> was convened in which the Congress Members also attended and the Council of Action of the APHLC was constituted. During the visit of the Prime Minister to Assam to assess the situation arising out of the language riots, both the APHLC and the Hill Students groups delivered their Memoranda in favour of carving out a separate State in case the language Bill could not be dropped. Mr. Sangma had also resigned from the Cabinet. The APHLC, in the meantime, had decided to meet from time to time, the first Conference being held at Shillong on July 6, 1960.

The second APHLC in August 1960, authorised the Council of Action to lay down the draft plan for the proposed Hill State. In this critical hour, the Central Government tried to intervene by endorsing the bilingual language plan known as Pant Formula recommending the use of both Hindi and Assamese but that did not bring about any compromise. At the following Assembly session, the Assam Legislative Assembly passed the original Assamese Language Bill on October 24, 1960, the very date on which was fixed the Hill State Demand Day by the APHLC, when hartals and processions, participated in by thousands of people, were held at Shillong and other administrative headquarters. Business undertakings, traffic, markets and shops on that day were brought to a standstill and picquets were performed.

The third APHLC held at Haflong (November 1960) examined the draft plan which envisaged the formation of Eastern Frontier State (as its new name) to comprise the autonomous Districts, NEFA and Tribal areas in Goalpara, Kamrup, Nowgong, Manipur and Tripura. It provided for a unicameral legislature of not less than 60 members. It would share the same Governor with NEFA as Agent to the President; it would

1. APHLC may be described as Alliance of Hill Parties, viz., Eastern Indian Tribal Union, Jaintia Durbar, Khasi-Jaintia Conference, Garo National Council and the Unit of the Swatantra Party. The other constituent-members were Mizo Union, People's Democratic Party of N. Cachar, Khasi-Jaintia National Conference, Muslim League and Nepali League of Garo Hills. The Mizo Union left the Conference in 1966 and the P.D.P. in 1970. (*Meghalaya Year Book*, 1972, p. 89).

have its own Ministers, High Court and University. The finances were expected to be provided by the Government of India under Article 275 of the Constitution to meet the cost of normal expenditure, development work and capital expenditure. English was proposed to be the State language until replaced by Hindi.

On November 24, 1960, a special delegation deputed by the conference, sought to convince the Prime Minister at New Delhi with regard to the paramount need to redress their grievances by forming a separate State. While appreciating them, Mr. Nehru pointed out that the separate State was not feasible owing to the limited resources of revenue by which it would be difficult to cope with the expenditure of the administration. The Union Government, Mr. Nehru stated, could do nothing more than boosting up some projects for development. However, in redressing their grievances, Mr. Nehru brought out another proposal known as *Scottish Pattern* to ensure them certain safeguards in language and enabling them to have the fullest control over educational and cultural matters. Under this plan, Mr. Nehru promised to bifurcate certain departments from the Assam Government over which they were to exercise full control. It was some sort of a State within a State, under which arrangement, a tribal regional Committee formed with the elected MLAs shall be responsible to the Assam Assembly for any proposal with power even to veto such Bills that might affect the Hill Districts or any part thereof. A Cabinet Minister in charge of Hill administration would be assisted by a Minister of State and one or two Deputy Ministers with jurisdiction over subjects such as horticulture, agriculture, education, forest, health and perhaps roads. The Hill Cabinet would exercise full authority over expenditure-control in subjects to be transferred to the Hill Cabinet. Budgets for both transferred and non-transferred subjects shall, however, be shown separately in the Assembly. A separate Financial Adviser would be appointed for the Hills. In case of disagreement between the Regional Committee and the Assembly, the Governor, acting in his discretion, may intervene. All money from the Centre would reach the tribal authorities directly. Besides, Mr. Nehru further suggested to liberalise the provisions in the sixth Schedule. The Hill leaders, however, failed to appreciate this proposal and insisted on having a separate Hill State. To them the plan was a vague and nebulous concept centring round the

idea of the Hill people enjoying a certain measure of autonomy within the State of Assam. It did not improve significantly over the measures under the sixth schedule.

During the Fourth conference held at Shillong on April 5-7, 1961, the Hill Leaders, however, disagreed as a veritable control over their own affairs was not practical in the Scottish Pattern. But by this time, the District Congress Committees, Garo, North Cachar and Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts had accepted the Scottish Pattern, and thus had come out of the fold of the APHLC. To make their point clear, non-co-operation movement was proposed to be launched against the Government's unresponsive attitude to the legitimate claims of the Hill people.

Both parties the APHLC and the Congress, resolved to contest in the 1962 general election when during the campaigns, the two parties participated at the debates organised for the public. The APHLC polled 11 out of 15 Assembly seats whereas the M. P. for Khasi and Jaintia, Mikir and Cachar Hills polled 91,850 votes against the Congress with 56,501 votes. The election results encouraging enough, the APHLC decided to withdraw henceforth the Assembly members from Assam Assembly on the 24th October 1962 as the first step to launch the non-cooperation movement.

The Seventh Conference at Shillong from March 21 to 24 reviewed the election results. In 1962 at the Lok Sabha Session, Prof. G.G. Swell, an APHLC M.P., drew the attention of the members to the language problems and convinced that an ultimate solution lay with the conferring of a Hill State.

The Eighth Conference (August 23-25, 1962) resolved to stage the non-violent Direct Action before March 31, 1963 as the more realistic measure to intensify Hill State Demand. On October 24, 1962, the Hill State Demand as organised through the hartals, pickets and processions was successful. On that memorable day, 7 M.L.A.s resigned from the Assembly. But owing to the serious menace arising out of the foreign aggression, the APHLC dropped the entire direct action programme for some time, and joined hands with the Government in intensifying defence efforts in the Hills. A fete held on November 14, 1962 by APHLC, yielded an amount of Rs. 11,000, which was donated to the Defence Fund.



And because the Direct Action programme was dropped, the APHLC again came to participate during the by-elections for filling up the vacancies caused by the erstwhile resignations of party's M.L.A.s when 4 candidates were returned in the Khasi and 1 in the Garo Hills. But in Mizo Hills, a more radical party, the Mizo National Front was born; since then the APHLC's influence became mitigated and the Front followed the new Programme.

The APHLC held at Shillong on June 4-6, 1963, resolved to continue co-operation with Government, until the Conference would deem it necessary to withdraw such co-operation. The leaders urged Mr. Nehru during his visit, to examine the problems of the Hills in true perspectives. He was told that it was due to the foreign aggression that the Direct Action plan was dropped and that they had participated fully in the Defence efforts.

Mr. Nehru, realising the implication of the conditions, came out with another offer known as the Nehru Plan hitherto modified of the Scottish Pattern. It contained more liberalised provisions especially in respect of the executive powers entitling the Hills to have a separate wing of Secretariat. The APHLC held at Shillong in October 1963, opined to accepting the Nehru Plan on trial basis but while accepting it, the leaders insisted on the establishment of a full-fledged Secretariat with all the portfolios of administration. An imperative need of enlarging the powers provided for in the Sixth Schedule and the inclusion of Shillong within the Autonomous United Khasi and Jaintia Hills was also urged. Mr. Nehru promised to appoint another Commission to consider the possible implementation of the proposed plan. An increase in the Assembly and Parliamentary seats was also pressed to a total of 30 members in the State Assembly not on the basis of population alone, but as the matter of special consideration, owing to the large area involved, the lack of communication and other reasons.

For reaching another settlement, the Pataskar Commission came thus to be formed to suggest constitutional remedies in context of the Nehru plan. The Commission recommended measures to co-ordinate activities at the District level and boost economic development plans. While envisaging no separate legislature for the hills, the Commission recommended to institute a Hill Area Committee by which all plans for initiating

legislation affecting the Hill area or any part thereof should be referred to it by the State Assembly. Some procedural rules for the working out of the Committee were laid down. Under this scheme, a separate Minister for the Hill Areas was proposed to be assisted by as many junior Ministers as necessary over the subjects transferred to the Hill Areas Department. Besides exercising jurisdiction over the transferred subjects, the Hill Areas Department would<sup>1</sup> also look into matters relating to the District Councils especially with regard to extension of supervision over the District Council development programme, execution of the special Development programmes and any special Development programmes approved by the Central Government, Planning Commission and the State Government. But even in respect of the subjects not transferred, the Hill Minister<sup>2</sup> would be consulted on matters relating to their disposal.

As regards the working of the District Council, the Commission did not envisage any further plan to enlarge the powers but insisted on a definite plan to manipulate the matters in a more systematic manner. It recommended that scope be thrown open that the District Council should start forthwith commercial and transport undertakings as might be allowed.<sup>3</sup> Besides a District Development Board was proposed to co-ordinate works with the District Council in the implementation of certain programmes. The Commission recommended to increase grants-in-aid to the District Council from the State Government. It was pointed out that a prompt system of handing over the distribution of royalty and minerals as well as

1. The subjects proposed to be transferred were agriculture, publicity and information, horticulture, cooperation, animal husbandry and veterinary, forests and soil conservation, community development, national extension service, tribal development block, education (upto the technical and higher secondary level), public health, local Government, social welfare, revenue, public works, small scale and rural industry, sericulture and weaving and other minor portfolios.

2. In the appointment of the Hill Ministers, the Chief Minister should consult the Hill M.L.A.s. Distribution of portfolios and number of persons to be appointed, vested with the Chief Minister's recommendations.

3. The Commission proposed to extend the following subjects to the District Council—land and revenue, education upto the higher secondary stage, roads and waterways, community projects, national extension service and tribal development blocks, agriculture and minor irrigation.

shares of income on vehicles should be followed. A careful audit into the accounts was also recommended.

Further the Commission urged on the Governor's eligibility to extend the life of the District Council by six months at a time and in no case by more than two years in all. It prescribed residential qualifications for the nontribal population by reducing the terms of residence from 12 to 2 years and envisaged the provision of four seats in the District Council for nominated persons. Among other provisions, the administration of forests was recommended to vest in the Minister for the Hill Area as who should consult the Advisory Committee of the Chief Executive Members of the District Councils.

Moreover, the office of a Commissioner was proposed to be instituted for expediting administrative and developmental measures. Senior officers of the rank of Additional or Joint or Deputy Heads of Departments were recommended to the charge of the administration of the different subjects in the Hill areas. The joint cadres of services for the whole State were to continue but the views of the Ministers should be given due consideration in respect of the selection of the personnel. There shall be a separate Area Budget in respect of the transferred subjects but budget allocations for the non-transferred subjects were to be shown separately. The Hill Area Committee shall formulate its view in matters relating to the budget before being presented at the Assembly but the Hill Area Budget should be more a matter of concern to the Hill Area Committee. A separate Financial Adviser was recommended for the Hill Areas Department.

The above proposals however were not acceptable to the Hill leaders who reverted their stand to the attainment of a separate State. The question was whether the Hill Areas Committee was competent enough to initiate pieces of legislation. The leaders opined that the Hill Secretariat proposed were restricted of its powers. Moreover, the proposal to bifurcate the area of the Shillong town within a radius of ten miles from the Khasi Hills District Council was resented although the authority which should be consulted was the Myllem State which has jurisdiction over the area.

As the above framework had not emerged to be a matter of general acceptance, the next measure was the appointment of

a six-Member Cabinet Committee headed by Shri G.L. Nanda, who during the middle of 1966, evolved a Sub-State Plan which sought to confer on the Hills a separate legislature and Cabinet, but could not work out to bring about a satisfactory solution acceptable to all. The APHLC, however, had resolved to go for a non-violent direct action as the best measure to get their grievances redressed. The leaders had also decided to boycott the general election scheduled in 1967. It was at this juncture that the Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi, came to Shillong in December, 1966 to explore the possibility of a workable solution ; addressing a largely attended meeting, she offered a plan towards the Re-organisation of Assam resting on a federal structure where both the Valley and the Hills were to attain an equal status, failing which they were due to be separated and the latter carved into a State. To sum up the newly proposed arrangement formulated on January 13, 1967 . "Bearing in mind the geography and the imperative need and co-ordinated development of this region as a whole, the Home Minister discussed with the APHLC leaders the proposal that a federal structure, composed of federating units having equal status, not subordinate to one another, should provide a basis for this re-organisation." Under this frame-work, it was envisaged to assign a few subjects of common interest to the proposed Federation while the Government of India was seeking to fulfil these terms and conditions under reference within six months provided both the APHLC and the Assam Government were agreed to. On this assurance, the APHLC reverted their previous decision and came out to contest during the elections scheduled in 1967. The rose was selected as the election symbol of the Conference. During the election, all the five candidates from the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills were returned, two of whom came out uncontested. As the Government had already committed to work out this new proposal, a Committee was appointed in which the interests concerned were represented to see to this. During the same time, the Shillong United Citizens' Association with representatives from the other minor communities proceeded to New Delhi to urge the Government that in working out the new arrangement, their interests should adequately be safeguarded.

But opposition against the newly enunciated Federal structure was also organised at the valley where hartals and processions at many places were held. This and other reasons

brought about delay in the implementation of the proposed arrangement, while at the same time, the APHLC wanted to work out a separation issue in the event, the proposed Federation could not be constituted owing to adverse reaction. Opposition continued to prevail for some time, for instance a spontaneous hartal was held on 24th January 1968, at many places in Assam to oppose this offer.

In this state of deadlock, Government deputed a Committee headed by Mr. Ashoka Mehta to examine the problem and thrash out a finally agreed formula. The Committee was scheduled to consist of two APHLC and seven leaders from the valley belonging to different parties. The APHLC, however, boycotted the proceedings and insisted on a full fledged State ; irrespective of that friction, the Committee held discussions with the leaders from the valley. The Committee was opposed to the basis of the federal structure but recommended the formation of a separate legislature of the Autonomous Area with the powers to exercise over the subjects assigned to it. The legislature should consist of not more than 40 and not less than 20 elected members in addition to not more than 3 nominated members. The Executive Council was to be headed by the Chief Executive Councillor ; other Councillors were to be appointed by the Governor on the advice of the Chief Executive Councillor ; a separate Secretariat was recommended for the Autonomous Area. The Governor, in giving decision to any Bill, would act on the advice of Chief Minister of Assam, the latter, however, being obliged to consult the Tribal Minister(s) of the State as well as the Chief Executive Councillors. The Governor would exercise appellate authority in case an appeal involving minority interests was lodged. The Hill Areas Minister would be appointed after the Chief Minister had consulted the Assembly Members of the State returned from the Hill Areas as well as the Chief Executive Councillors. The subjects over which Autonomous Areas Legislature would extend had already been mentioned in the Sixth Schedule but a total of 50 subjects was assigned to the Autonomous Area. Some of the most important subjects included were local communications, village or town police, small-scale industries, hydro-electric and power generation and middle school management. Safeguards were also provided to the District Legislature against enactments of the State Legislative Assembly without the consent of the Chief Executive Councillors.

All the proposals enunciated under the new schemes were unacceptable to the APHLC who further observed that the Committee went against their own principle for furthering the Hills integration which they had been fighting for so long to preserve it. As a long delay had hitherto been caused to the announcement of the Government on January 13, 1967 relating to the Re-organisation of Assam, the 9 APHLC MLAs resigned from the Assembly.

The 18th Conference held at Tura from 25th to 30th June, 1968 expressed great resentment at the continued delay caused in the formation of a separate State which was held to be the best, simplest and final solution although they urged the people to pinch their faith still in the Government's commitment and give them an opportunity to work out the plan. "The Conference reiterated that any form of Re-organisation of Assam must confer on the Hill Areas requisite dignity and equal status with the rest of the present State". The Conference further reiterated its resolve to launching a non-violent Direct Action in the event there would be further delay to redressing their grievances.

At this critical hour, the Government of India upheld to change this issue from local to national level. At the same time, an Internal Affairs Committee was formed to take up this issue.

Tension loomed large. September 9, 1968 was the scheduled date on which non-violent direct action was to start. Efforts were made to picket the Assam Legislative Assembly in Session but it was a partial success, while the Assembly was described to function normally but under abnormal circumstances. The day following saw picketings done at the office premises of the Government. At this juncture, the Autonomous State Plan was offered to the APHLC when the movement was called off to give time for its examination.

The 20th Session of the APHLC was held on the 14th and 15th October, 1968 which decided to give the plan a fair trial on experimental basis—the resolution reads : 'The 20th Session of the APHLC held at Tura has received comprehensive reports of the meetings held in this connection in the various parts of the hill areas. These reports convey the consensus in

the hill areas in that the people, while expressing deep disappointment at the failure of the Government of India to meet their aspirations in full and reasserting that a fully separate State would be the best solution, nevertheless feel that the plan be given a fair trial.

Now, therefore, having fully considered the public opinion in the Hill areas, the political realities in the country and the larger interests of the country as a whole, this Conference resolved to give the Autonomous Hill State Plan a fair trial with the clear understanding that the APHLC will continue all efforts to achieve a fully separate State comprising all the Hill areas of the present State of Assam". Four top ranking leaders were deputed to apprise the Government of India of the shortcomings and anomalies as well as reaction of the Hill people to the various aspects of the plan. The 20th Session of the Conference also issued direction for keeping in abeyance the launching of a non-violent direct action. But to Hill State People's Democratic Party just born, the acceptance was a hasty decision. The party was opposed to the limited powers envisaged in the plan while the APHLC contended that its acceptance was to give it a fair trial.

The proposal of the autonomous State was borrowed from the idea of autonomous areas envisaged by the Ashoka Mehta Committee. 'It provided the University and higher education and also law and order would vest with autonomous State with the rider that law and order would exclude matters pertaining to border security, armed police and public order which would be the responsibility of the Governor of Assam to be discharged in his discretion.'

## **MEGHALAYA WAS BORN**

### **Assam Re-organisation**

The Re-organisation of Assam necessitated constitutional amendment by the Parliament to enable the Government pilot an actual Re-organisation Bill at a later stage. The Amendment Bill (Constitution 22nd Amendment Bill) should have been supported by not less than two-thirds of members sitting at the Lok Sabha; that obtained the Bill would have again to be ratified by at least half of the State Legislative Assemblies. An Amendment Bill having received thus the prescribed requisite support would facilitate the Government to work out the actual Re-organisation Bill.

On March 25, 1969, the Constitution Amendment Bill placed before the Lok Sabha, failed to secure the requisite majority owing to the absence of some Congress members, when the Bill was put to vote. The Congress absentees were present at the first count even though the opposition absentees at the second outnumbered the defaulting Congress Members. However, within a few days, the Bill was re-introduced and passed by a thumping majority of members present; not to speak of the votes polled on behalf of the Congress, about 100 were drawn from the Opposition. Towards the close of April 1969, the Bill was approved by the Rajya Sabha. It was then circulated to the States for their ratification.

By the middle of May 1969, a conference of members from the Assam Cabinet, the APHLC and the Home Ministry was held at New Delhi to discuss the draft Bill towards the Re-organisation. In the following months, many State Assemblies



with both Congress and Coalition Ministries had ratified the Bill. A Chief Secretary designate was appointed for Meghalaya.

On September 21, when the Prime Minister visited Shillong, the principal leaders of the APHLC were kept informed of the latest development concerning the Bill and of the Government efforts to solicit support towards the Draft Bill. In the beginning of November, a few APHLC leaders were in New Delhi to look to the expeditious implementation of the autonomous State Plan.

On 8th December Prof. G.G. Swell was proposed as Deputy Speaker for the Lok Sabha and declared elected on the next day. Felicitated by the distinguished members of the House, Prof. Swell in reply said, 'the heart of India is .....great..... Everyone of her children, however small, has a place of honour in this land'. On the same day, the Lok Sabha passed the Scheduled Castes and Tribes Constitution Amendment Bill which sought to extend by another 10 years from 1970, safeguards guaranteed to the Scheduled Castes, Scheduled Tribes and Anglo-Indians which was unanimously approved by the Rajya Sabha after a few days.

The 15th December 1969 is memorable for on that day, the Assam Re-organisation Bill was introduced which sought to provide for the formation within Assam of an autonomous state to be known as Meghalaya by the Minister of State for Home Affairs. Another Bill entitled North-Eastern Council Bill was also introduced which provided for the formation of North-Eastern Council for the North-Eastern region. During this time, APHLC Leaders in New Delhi contacted the Members of Parliament on the issue relating to the Re-organisation Bill.

On December 22 there was almost unanimity of decision in favour of the Bill when it was brought up for discussion in the House except a few members who felt that it could lead to further disintegration. The Home Minister who piloted the Bill at this stage explained some important provisions with safeguards placed to prevent unwarranted disintegration. He urged for its acceptance on experimental basis. The House backed up his proposal not to refer the Bill to the Select Committee of the Parliament.

The Bill was passed on the 24th December 1969 by the Lok Sabha. One important amendment carried over, related

to the consultation by the Central Government with the Governments of Assam and Meghalaya in connection with the period of a member of All-India Service on the Assam State cadre or who served in connection with the affairs of Meghalaya. According to news report, Parliamentary history was made when the Assam Re-organisation Bill was adopted and passed by the Rajya Sabha after suspending certain procedural rules within three hours after its acceptance by the Lok Sabha. And never before, had a Bill been passed on the same day, by both Houses.

Shillong, Tura and other places were jubilant. In the words of Mr. W.A. Sangma, Chief Minister Designate in the provisional set up, the Bill was a Christmas gift to the people of Meghalaya. Simultaneously a High Level Advisory Council was constituted with a view to encouraging an integrated approach to the security and development of the Region as a whole for which, it was proposed to constitute the North-Eastern Council to consist of the Governor of Assam and Nagaland, one Minister each from these States and the Chief Ministers of the Union Territories in the Region. The Council was intended to provide a unified and coordinated approach towards the development of Inter-State communications, common irrigation and power and flood control projects and co-ordinated plans for agricultural production, regional food self-sufficiency and balanced industrial development of the Region. This Council will also discuss other matters of common interest to the Region and suggest suitable measures including appropriate institutional arrangements. The Government of India will provide a Secretariat of adequate status and experience and also a Planning Cell with the necessary complement of experts under the Planning Adviser to the Council.

Under the arrangement chalked out, the Meghalaya Provisional Assembly would be elected by an electoral College consisting of elected members of each District Council on proportionate representation. The Assembly in the Interim arrangement would consist of not more than 55 and not less than 35 members besides 3 members representing minority communities to be nominated.

In conformity with the provisions in the Assam Re-organisation Bill, the people in Mikir and North Cachar Hills were given an option to join Meghalaya or stay in Assam in

accordance with the decision of their respective District Council ; both Districts would have, however, been integrated with Meghalaya but, as later on opposition to the APHLC had gained ground, the Government of India reviewing the matter on the more realistic approach, considered that the two Districts should have been able to decide themselves whether they would join Meghalaya or not. During the second half of February 1970, the two District Councils announced the results of their decision. The Mikir Hills District Council by an overwhelming majority said *No* while the majority of the members in the North Cachar Hills District Council decided not to join the new Sub-State.<sup>1</sup>

On March 20, 1970 the APHLC elected the members of the 38 Member Provisional Assembly— Garo, Jaintia and Khasi—but the Hill State People's Democratic Party boycotted the election. 4 Members were Congress from Garo Hills. Other seats were filled up with nominated members according to the provision in the Act. The members nominated comprised one Assamese, one Nepali and one Bengali.

A shadow Government was evolved in March 1970 and a Secretariat was constituted with Finance, Education, District Council Affairs, Industries, Public Works and other Departments.

The APHLC was a dominant party in the Provisional Legislative set up ; a few Congress in addition to the nominated members were also associated. Meghalaya, in practical consideration, had a more or less homogeneous party structure owing to the absence of a well organised opposition party. The Hill State People's Democratic Party on the other hand, indicated not to sit and participate in the proceedings as the Legislative Assembly was of a provisional character.

### **The Assam Re-organisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969**

The very word *Autonomous* seems appropriate, the Act read in context of its provisions. As on par of the other

1. The two District Councils could join the new State, provided a resolution was adopted by a majority of not less than two-thirds of the members of the respective District Councils.

States, the Act provided for the setting up of a separate Legislative Assembly and a Council of Ministers. The same judicial powers hitherto exercised by the village courts, the District Council and the Deputy Commissioner were to continue. But certain subjects were concurrent with Assam while over a few other subjects, the autonomous State could not exercise its full power. The District Council continued to function and some amendments in the Sixth Schedule of the Constitution had been provided.

The Legislative Assembly consisted of not less than 35, and not more than 55 members, but the Governor of Assam had been empowered to nominate not more than 3 persons to represent minority interests. The executive powers of the autonomous State were differentiated from those of Assam while the Parliament was entitled to enact any new law and declare it enforceable in the autonomous State. Other matters such as the constitution of the Council of Ministers, duration of the Assembly session, appointment of the Speaker and a Deputy Speaker, rules for the summoning and dissolution of the Assembly, proclamation of Emergency, Address of Governor and sending of message, qualification and rights, privileges and immunities of the members were the same as those of the other States. In respect of the issue of ordinances, the same procedure relating to the other States was adopted. The procedure relating to the passing of any Bill was the same as that adopted by Assemblies in the other States, but in respect of the concurrent subjects, the Governor was eligible to abide by the advice of the Chief Minister of Assam. On matters relating to law-making power, the consolidated fund, demands for grants and appropriation Bills, grants—supplementary, additional and excess, the new autonomous State was to act on the same antecedental rules provided or framed for the other States.

In the arrangement relating to the property of the Union, neither the Meghalaya Government nor any authority in Meghalaya had been empowered to levy tax on such property unless the Parliament has decided that such property immediately before the commencement of the Act, was treated or liable to be treated to be subject to such tax and so long it was levied in the new State. It had been provided also that Meghalaya had no power to levy tax on the property of Assam so long as the latter exempted Meghalaya from payment of such

tax on the property of Meghalaya in Assam. Free transit of vehicles registered anywhere in Assam had to be granted in respect of those plying in Meghalaya so long Assam has exempted such vehicles registered in Meghalaya and plying in Assam from tax. Assam was eligible to make use of acquisition, holding and disposal of property and for the making of contracts at any place inside Meghalaya on reciprocal basis that Assam granted to the Autonomous State Government the similar rights and privileges if the latter desired to carry out such enterprises in Assam.

Tax on consumption or sale of electricity derived anywhere in the new State but outside the limits of Shillong municipality was deemed to have formed part of the consolidated fund of Meghalaya. The dividend of tax collected by the Assam Government at the first point of sale or purchase of goods had been deemed to be payable to Meghalaya Government as may be agreed upon by the Government of Assam and the Government of Meghalaya or in default of such agreement as the Union Government otherwise may determine. Matters such as registration and development of oil fields, petroleum and petrol products, liquids and substances were deemed to have been included in the Public Services. The Union Government reserved to itself power to settle disbursement of shares of taxes on income, the distributable Union duties of excise (Distribution Act, 1957), the additional duties of excise (Goods of Special Importance) Act, 1957, Constitution (Distribution of Revenue) Order, 19 9, additional duties of excise (goods of Special Importance Act, 1957) and the Estate Duty (Distribution) Act, 1962 as payable to the Autonomus State.

A dual arrangement persisted in the important provisions, the most vital one being related to the administration of Shillong in as much as the para 20 (sub-para 2) of the Sixth Schedule was still retained except for a clause which provided for a joint consultation among the Union Government and the Government of Assam and of Meghalaya on matters relating to education and water supply, development and administration for which a special Committee was to be constituted in which the parties concerned were to be represented.

Concerning subjects, Meghalaya had got 61 out of 65 subjects but the Legislative Assemblies of the State of Assam

and of Meghalaya were to exercise concurrent powers of legislation over the following subjects :—

Agricultural schemes of common benefit to the autonomous State and the rest of Assam ;

Conservation of forests in catchment areas of major irrigation, flood control ;

Hydro-electric and navigation projects ;

Acquisition and requisitioning of property ;

Transfer of non-agricultural property ;

Registration of documents ;

Recovery of public dues.

The Assam State Government continued jurisdiction over subjects of common interest, viz., State highways, major projects in the field of irrigation, flood control, drainage, water storage and water power, navigation and major industries. Meghalaya had been given the power to raise village and town police but over a unified administration of public order and police, Assam was left to decide the issue.

Among other provisions, the autonomous State would continue to be represented in the Assam Legislative Assembly. The Assam High Court, the Assam Public Service Commission and the Assam State Electricity Board would continue jurisdiction over the state. The joint cadres of All-India services and some of the higher State Services also continued. The autonomous State, however, had been given power to decide lower appointment of staff for which a Selection Board would be constituted.

The Act also contained provisions relating to the assignment of assets and liabilities between the two Governments with directives to the disposal of lands and goods, treasury and bank balance, taxes and arrears, recovery of loans and balance, investments and credits in certain funds, pensions and contracts.

The Fourth Schedule of the Act provided some amendments in the Sixth Schedule to the Constitution.

The Act had not met the full aspirations of the people as the Assam Government has been placed in position to exert higher powers for which none could question over the subjects assigned to the State Government of Assam. There was much scope for evolving friction and conflict but there were perspectives for adjustment and co-operation. In the long run, the system was apt to prove complicated as Assam Government had full jurisdiction over subjects such as State highways, major projects, major industries etc. and as the Assam State Electricity Board and Public Service Commission continued to have jurisdiction. There were other demerits as the Meghalaya Government has been limited to collecting the first point sales tax. There was no mention as to the return of dividends from income accruing from transport services although the national highways were located for a longer distance in the hills. Nothing was mentioned as regards her share from the income that may have arisen from other public sectors as major industries. Moreover Meghalaya was limited to raise town and village police which in context of the provisions were to be excluded from the limits of the Shillong municipality. Now under the North-Eastern Areas Re-organisation Act, the inclusion of Shillong in Meghalaya may help to make it more viable.

Last but not least, Meghalaya was hitherto unrepresented in the Assam Legislative Assembly on the erstwhile resignation of its members in which the vacant seats had not been filled up till the North-Eastern Areas Re-organisation Act was passed.

### **Autonomous State Inauguration**

The inauguration is memorable ; on that day the long-felt need of the Garo and the Khasi-Jaintia people for a State of their own was partially realised. Therefore it will be counted as auspicious. It holds bright promises provided the people are ready to work hard. It reminded how in January 1970, various speakers pin-pointed the need of true labour and hard work to raise the welfare of the new State and make it a path of beauty and a shining outpost. There needs to be a fullest measure of public co-operation to make the new State a success.

The inauguration was held on April 2, 1970. The first principal observation was the swearing in of the Five-member Sangma Ministry in public. The Prime Minister inaugurated the new Autonomous State. She was flown by a helicopter

from the Borjhar airport and landed at Upper Shillong air-strip at 10.05 A.M. She was driven in to the heart of Shillong, the five-mile-long road being thronged by thousands of people waving flags to welcome her. 'A red rose topped the Hill State green flag with two hills on either side'. At main junctions, arches were built which welcomed the Prime Minister. The formal inauguration was held at the Garrison grounds. The Prime Minister conveyed the greetings of the Government and the people of India to the people of Meghalaya on this auspicious day and remarked that 'the inauguration of Meghalaya was another example of democracy taking firm roots in the country and showed how difficult problems could be solved through mutual understanding and good-will'. The people were exhorted to conjure up a vision of 'new heights to be scaled no matter how much we do or how far we go. Though pressures will mount and impatience will increase, we shall become stronger and be able to do so more'.

During the swearing in of the Ministry, Captain Sangma read out the message of greetings from Mr. B. P. Chaliha and that over, colourful-draped Khasi and Garo girls entertained the large crowd with folk dance and music. In replying to Captain Sangma, the Prime Minister dwelt on the imperative need to work for the advancement and well-being of the people inhabiting this strategic and beautiful part of the country. She hoped the Government of India would do whatever possible to help solve the problems of the new State. On this charming land, Mrs. Gandhi said: 'Meghalaya is a musical sound evoking thoughts of high hills and heights crested with clouds. I too am a child of the hills'. The Khasi translation of her speech was delivered by Prof. G. G. Swell.

#### **Extracts of Welcome Address by the Chief Minister, Meghalaya**

"It is largely due to keen interest shown by you and the statesman-like manner in which you have handled this delicate problem that the State could come into being peacefully with goodwill from all sides".

"Now that the State has come into being, we want to take all necessary steps to discharge our responsibility to the people and to bring the State at par with other more developed regions of the country".



“We trust and hope that your interest in these areas will continue and that your Government will give us financial and technical assistance to enable us to undertake development of the new the State”.

The statesmanship, understanding and sympathy showed by Mrs. Gandhi and the late Mr. Nehru in tackling the problems of Meghalaya touched the hearts of the people.

Captain Sangma said, “We appreciate the statesmanship and co-operation shown by the Assam Chief Minister and his colleagues . . . in good-will and understanding for the prosperity of the new State”.

He pointed out to the new problems faced by the State which included the development of agriculture, improvement of means of communications, finding outlets for the produce of the area, exploitation of natural resources and in general provide a better living standard to the people. The long term plan to develop Shillong, the capital of Assam, Meghalaya and the present headquarters of NEFA administration on modern lines and to make prominent tourist centres was envisaged.

Looking forward for further guidance, he said: “We trust and hope that your Government will assist us in the implementation of an adequate development plan which will remove the existing disparity between Meghalaya and the rest of the country”.

Mr. Mahendra Mohan Choudhury representing Mr. B. P. Chaliha, the Chief Minister of Assam who on health grounds could not attend, said that the people of Assam were happy, ‘for we do not regard this occasion despite the administrative separation as marking any parting of the ways’. The Assam Government would spare no effort to promote and ensure the prosperity and happiness of Meghalaya and her people.

### **Assam Chief Minister's Message**

“The creation of Meghalaya as an autonomous State with the two Districts of United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Garo Hills within Assam is indeed a unique event in the constitutional history of our Republic. The peaceful manner and agreed manner this autonomous State has been brought into being would go down as a bold testimony that democracy has

struck roots in our country. It has also proved the dynamism of our Constitution.

I must congratulate the people of Meghalaya and their leaders for their wisdom in not severing their links with Assam. I should not perhaps re-emphasise that the destinies of the people of Meghalaya and of Assam and as a matter of fact of the entire eastern region of India are so inexorably linked that they would have to share each other's joy and sorrow and work in unison in their march forward whatever be the administration or political set up.

On this very happy occasion of the inauguration of this new autonomous State, I on behalf of the Government and the people of Assam and on my own behalf offer our heartiest felicitations to our brothers and sisters of Meghalaya and wish them godspeed in their march towards prosperity".

Mrs. Gandhi attended a reception held at the Raj Bhavan, Shillong and until evening she stayed before she departed off at about 4 P.M. Some other functions followed and thus the jubilant celebrations passed over on this day.

### **Provisional Assembly—Inauguration**

A few days intervened before we next pass into the inauguration of the Meghalaya Legislative Assembly. The Inauguration was fixed on April 14, the venue was shifted to Tura. The small town located on the spur of the middle range was packed up with streams of visitors drawn from Shillong and distant places and the cultural troupes from Nagaland, Manipur and the Mizo Hills. Mr. Y.B. Chavan, Union Home Minister and Mr. M.M. Choudhury, Minister of Assam attended, the latter representing the Chief Minister of Assam who could not come. During the auspicious observation, the APHLC Parliamentary Party elected Prof. R.S. Lyngdoh for the office of Speaker of the newly set up Legislative Assembly after Mr. S.J. Duncan had performed the task of the Presiding Officer for the day. Professor Lyngdoh was returned unopposed.

Welcoming the Union Minister, the Chief Minister conveyed the feelings of the new Government that there should be accelerated economic development which should have been made possible with the help of the Government of India while the

State should always be in a position to make the best use of the latter's help and support; the Union Home Minister, in reply, observed that the problems of the new State would have to be faced with courage to overcome them and in this, the co-operation of the Assam Government and the people of Assam, the co-operation of the Government of India and the rest of the nation would be of great use. Mr. Chavan also dwelt on the need to further the cause of integration and conveyed the wishes of the Government of India, of the people of India and of the different religions of India to the people of the new State and to work further for the cause of secularism upheld so far. Mr. Choudhury pointed out that the people of the hills and of the plains may administratively be separated but all belong to India as its integrated parts and pin-pointed the need for the cause of integrated development and security of the North-eastern region.

The inauguration celebrations were highlighted by the cultural show in which colourful dances such as Mizo bamboo dance, Naga war dance, Manipur dance apart from the Meghalayan dances were held.

Hundreds of visitors were accommodated at the camps specially constructed for the occasion in this peaceful town although the area was renowned in the past for the acts of Garo chivalry and heroism. This modern centre of Garo culture and thought in which the other villages near and far also shared, resounded with the notes of gaiety and jubilation during the inauguration day and every thing went well on that day. It was spring time and the hills and valleys were revived in the creative beauty of nature. According to the *Implanter* dated 18th April, 1970, the celebration synchronized with the 19th anniversary of the Garo Hills District Council.

The inauguration was over and the first session adjourned to 20th April 1970 was scheduled at the Council Hall, Shillong, which was to be forthwith its venue.<sup>1</sup>

1. At the first session on April 22, 1970, Mr. G. A. Marak was elected Deputy Speaker.

The following Khasi-Anglian nature song may be an appropriate descriptive of the season :—

*'t was spring-time now. The winter's gone,  
Behold there was new life and birth,  
Wrought on the bleak and barren earth  
By hands divine, all unseen done.*

*The hills were roved in purple green,  
The trees their blooming branches spread.  
In every grove, birds sang and played  
Under the arching foliage green.*

*Lo, down the vale, how merrily  
The steamlets dance along their beds  
Of flowery fields and grassy meads  
E'er swarmed by the laborious bee.*

*Across the clear blue sky and fair  
The snow-white clouds make slow their flight;  
And all was calm save where the kite  
With shrieking cries frightened the air.*

*And there was joy upon the mountain,  
And there was joy upon the plain;  
The gentle showers and dropping rain  
Revived and soothed the drying fountain.*

*'Thus throughout nature, vast and great  
A kind of renavation flowed:  
The earth with radiant beauty glowed  
In all its verdant bloom arrayed.*

(Part VIII of *The Stag*, adaptation of a Khasi tale composed in English original by the late U Mondon Bareh).

## *Chapter 8*

### **PROVISIONAL GOVERNMENT**

**(April 1970—March 1972)**

The administration was engaged at the initial stages to properly organising the departments in which some schemes were apportioned towards a co-ordinated development in the many fields. In respect of tourism, attention was to be drawn towards the beautification of Shillong, the organisation of Jowai, Umiam lake and Tura into tourist centres. Further, emphasis was laid on the formation of an industrial belt in Khanapara-Byrnihat area, the expansion and improvement in technical education, development of agro and forest-based industries; similarly suggestions were made towards the organisation of the viable farming units, formation of Khadi and Village Industries Board, the setting up of the Industrial Development Corporation, the opening of industrial township and estate, the resumption of the techno-economic survey and the opening of a fruit preservation factory. Measures to check up land wastage were also to be considered. Attention further was to be paid to the rehabilitation of the worst-hit villagers from the border area, the re-grouping of some Garo hamlets into economic viable units and the efficient management of supply position. Emphasis was laid on measures to intensify agricultural production through various means. The District Councils may be assessed as regards to their capacity towards boosting programmes in respect of agricultural and animal husbandry development, community development, co-operation, village planning and social welfare. Avenues for training in other specialised fields were being explored. A plan to tap the industrial potentials was being envisaged.

To mobilise credit facilities in a proper manner, a separate Meghalaya Co-operation Apex Bank was constituted after it was separated from the parent organisation of Assam in February, 1971. But as there is a diverse system of land tenure, a much more uniform system was necessary to minimise difficulties with regard to extension of credit facilities. Ways and means to work out a convenient system of land tenure were no doubt necessary.

To quicken distribution of rice in the border area more efficiently, a subsidy rice transport was sought to be implemented.

In respect of communication, attention was being paid to developing the Shillong—Nongstoin-Tura road as a trunk road in the State. To other road Damra-Durugiri-Nagalbibra-Siji-Baghmara was being taken up by the Border Roads Organisation.

Similarly measures were being envisaged to extend medical facilities to the villages located at interior places and the posting of personnel in the public health services.

In respect of the higher academic centres, there were only three colleges as the more advanced educational centres were confined within the limits of the Shillong Municipality.

A scheme for delimitation of electoral constituencies was worked out in August 1970 for the Legislative Assembly which provided 4 constituencies for the Jowai Sub-division, 18 Constituencies for Shillong Sub-division and 16 constituencies for the Garo Hills District. Consequently in anticipation of full Statehood being conferred, it was decided however to work out another de-limitation as final arrangement by which the regular Statehood would require a minimum 60 Assembly seats.

An important Act passed by the Assembly known as Meghalaya Prevention of Gambling Act was declared enforceable from the 14th December, 1970 which sought to ban completely the *teer* game<sup>1</sup> connected with archery. The passing of the Bill was preceded by the promulgation of an ordinance by the Assam Government in August, 1970 which prohibited this game anywhere in Assam. The Act passed in Meghalaya.

1. Mention is made of the game in the last chapter.

## *Chapter 9*

### **MEGHALAYA STATEHOOD**

In 1970 the Union Government announced their decision to grant statehood to Manipur and Tripura but by that time, agitations for full statehood in Meghalaya were mounting up. The demand was reiterated. During the first week of September 1970 at the public meeting, held by the District Congress Committee, a resolution was adopted towards conferring statehood upon the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and the Garo Hills while the door was left open to the other autonomous districts to join it as and when they desired. The HSPDP had also contended on this issue. At the same time there was growing sensation in the plain areas for the construction of a separate capital for Assam. The Government reiterated the need to shift the capital in conformity with the wishes of the people.<sup>1</sup> When Mr. K. C. Pant, Union Minister of State for Home Affairs, visited, both the Congress and the APHLC leaders pressed their respective points, the latter putting forward their views for the attainment of a full State and the inclusion of Shillong in that State while the Congress Legislative Party in Assam upheld the people's agitation to shift the capital. Government put up an estimated cost of Rs. 34 crores. for this purpose.

1. The proposal was reiterated at the Assembly (Assam) on the 16th November, 1970 when the Government plan was made known to start the preliminaries about shifting of Assam's capital from Shillong to the plains. The Government proposed to take up in hand this matter as speedily as possible.

Earlier to this on 10th September, a youth gathering at Durbar Hall, Shillong, adopted a resolution to include Shillong in the administrative jurisdiction of Meghalaya.

The 22nd APHLC session held on 19th and 21st-22nd September, 1970 adopted the following resolution in favour of a clear-cut full State, "Whereas in its 20th session held at Tura in 1968, this Conference, while recognising certain inherent defects of the Autonomous Hill State plan, decided to give it a fair trial with the clear understanding that the APHLC would continue all efforts for the creation of a fully separate State; and whereas from the difficulties already faced by the Meghalaya Government in working out the plan and from indications also, this conference is now convinced that the autonomous Hill State Plan will not succeed, now therefore this Conference strongly urges the Government of India to take immediate steps for the constitution of Meghalaya into a fully separate State.

This Conference takes note of and approves the timely action taken by the Party Leadership in sending telegrams to the Government of India urging acceptance of the Party's continuing demand for a fully separate State".

Similarly the Meghalaya Assembly Session on September 30, adopted a resolution thus: 'Having regard to the difficulties which have already arisen to the surface and which are bound to confront the Government in increasing manner in the implementation of the complicated scheme embodied in the Assam Re-organisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969, this House resolves that the Government of India be moved to take immediate steps to bring Meghalaya on a par with the other sister States of the Union by converting this autonomous State into a full fledged State'.

These resolutions followed up, Capt. W.A. Sangma and his colleagues had been to New Delhi to apprise the Union Government of the recent reaction of the people and convince the Government of the various irregularities in the provisional set up. The Union Government had already examined the case and then reached a decision to take up a final Re-organisation of Meghalaya into a full State. Mr. Sangma's mission was a near success for on November 10, 1970, Mrs. Indira Gandhi addressed in the Parliament thus: 'As the House is aware,



some time ago we re-organised the State of Assam and constituted the Garo Hills and Khasi and Jaintia Hills Districts into the autonomous State of Meghalaya within Assam. This arrangement took into account the need to provide adequate scope for the political aspirations of the people of this area while preserving the over-all unity of the State of Assam. The decision to grant Statehood to Manipur and Tripura however necessitated a fresh look at the status of Meghalaya'. The Prime Minister added that Meghalaya had come to exist with the goodwill from all corners in the House and she expected full Statehood proposed to be conferred upon would be welcomed by the House. On the same day, a similar announcement was conveyed in the Rajya Sabha by the Minister of State for Home Affairs. The Chief Minister of Assam told the Assembly about this decision and commenting on it, he said: 'I on behalf of the Government of Assam welcome the decision and wish all the best to the Government and people of Meghalaya'. He made his point clear that 'we may be separated by administration but nature has created us as one and single entity and we shall have to live together for eternity; we have to march hand in hand toward progress and the integrated development of the Eastern Region of India'. In building the Assam's new capital it was suggested that the Centre however should be in a position to provide adequate funds. The Assam State Council of the CPI welcomed the Centre's decision for conferring full statehood upon Meghalaya.

The delay in the passing of the Bill was due to many factors. Much consideration would have been given to Assam people's view on the shifting of the capital and the financial implication. Bangladesh Affairs also helped hamper early action. Moreover the possibility on any equitable arrangement with regard to the Interim phase was to be found out. The question centred round the control of the capital for a period of three years. In this connection, the Assam Government of course insisted on minimum claims for continuing jurisdiction over three wards and leave the rest of the wards in Shillong to the Meghalaya Government during the interim arrangement. Later on Assam insisted on one ward only of the capital. During the second week of September 1971, news report indicated that the total responsibility over the capital would be necessitated to devolve upon Meghalaya Government as 'one State could not delegate such powers (over State

subjects) to another'. The most that could be done was 'to permit Assam the use of Government buildings currently hers in Shillong'.

Towards the close of October 1971, the North-Eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Bill was almost ready which besides endorsing the formation of the North-eastern Council provided for the establishment of the States of Manipur and Tripura, the formation of the State of Meghalaya and of the Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh (a new name for NEFA). The North-Eastern Council would exist as a high level advisory Body and seek to integrate and co-ordinate policy matters on regional balanced development and security.

In the final arrangement with regard to Shillong, the Bill provided that Meghalaya State shall comprise—

- “(a) the territories which immediately before that day were comprised in the Autonomous State of Meghalaya formed under section 3 of the Assam Re-organisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969; and
- (b) so much of the territories comprised within the cantonment and municipality of Shillong as did not form part of that autonomous State and thereupon the said territories shall cease to form part of the existing State of Assam”.

An arrangement in this regard was that the existing corporate bodies of Assam unless sooner dissolved would continue. The permits issued to parties by the Assam Government of goods would remain valid and no counter signature would be necessary. The tax-free vehicles would continue also to avail the existing facilities. But the Central Government be sought to empower to amend, modify or alter any provisions of these laws.

The existing Boards and Corporations of the State of Assam such as the Assam State Electricity Board, the Ware Housing Corporation, the Assam Financial Corporation and other Corporate Bodies shall continue to function under the interim arrangement.

Under this arrangement, 50 Assembly seats in the coming regular State Assembly were reserved for the Scheduled Tribes but 10 were opened to contest to both scheduled and non-scheduled tribes. Until the next election, the present members of the Assembly returned by the District Councils would continue in which capacity they will represent the capital also.

Meghalaya was inter-connected with the problems of the North-eastern region as a whole in which emphasis was laid on the scope of integrated approach which had received so much attention. The North-Eastern Council Bill passed in May 1970 was extended over subjects such as border disputes, linguistic minorities and inter-State transport. The Governor of Assam was to be the chairman of the Council which was to include the Chief Minister of Assam and Meghalaya, one Minister each from them as recommended by the respective Chief Ministers, the Chief Ministers of the Union Territories of Manipur and Tripura and other dignitaries (the number to be fixed). The door was open to Nagaland to join. All questions in the meetings were to be decided by the majority of votes but the chairman, in case of equality of votes, would have a casting vote. One member from the Planning Commission may also be invited.

The Bill elicited mixed reaction. It was pointed out that its very tight administrative character may leave little room for reflecting shades of public opinion. Moreover Nagaland had not then decided to join the Council.

The State of affairs arising from the Bangladesh and other connected problems necessitated Government re-thinking towards augmenting the North-Eastern Council for a co-ordinated and integrated approach in context of a balanced development of the whole region. The Government was envisaging a plan to co-ordinate matters at the regional superstructure and strengthen the administrative machinery which jurisdiction would extend to Inter-State Road development, the Central Sector Industries, a Single Cadre Service, Common River Valley Projects and Securities. According to the revised plan there would be one Governor, one High Court and two cadres of services for the whole region and the Council would function under the Union Home Ministry. Thus an effective forum as means of co-ordination be provided in respect of co-ordinated development and security in the region as a whole.

According to a commentary which appeared in the *Implanter* dated November 13, 1971, the North-Eastern Council had been provided adequate scope to function more as an Advisory Body and make relevant recommendations as to any matter of common interest in the field of economic and social planning or any matter of common interest concerning Inter-State transport and communications and any matter relating to power or flood control projects of common interest.

To mention the main provisions, the Council was eligible :

- (a) to formulate for the States represented in that Council, a unified and co-ordinated regional plan (which will be in addition to the State plan) in regard to matters of common importance to that area ;
- (b) to determine priorities and recommend the stages in which the regional plan may be implemented ;
- (c) to recommend the location of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan ;
- (d) to review from time to time the implementation of the projects and schemes included in the regional plan and recommend measures for effecting co-ordination in the implementation of the projects and schemes by the Government of the States concerned ;
- (e) where a project or scheme was intended to benefit two or more States, recommend the manner in which : —
  - (i) such project or scheme may be executed or implemented, managed or maintained,
  - (ii) the benefits thereon may be shared among the beneficiary States, and
  - (iii) the expenditure thereon may be incurred ;
- (f) on a review of progress of the expenditure, recommend, from time to time, to the Central Government the quantum of financial assistance to be given to the State or States entrusted with the execution of any project or scheme included in the regional plan ;
- (g) to recommend undertaking of all surveys and investigation of projects in any State represented in the

Council to facilitate consideration of the feasibility of including new projects in the regional plan ;

- (h) review from time to time measures taken by the State represented on the Council for the maintenance of security and public order therein and recommend to the Government of States concerned further measures necessary in this regard.

Opinion was divided as to the feasibility of this Council. The Government policy in this regard was that in spite of all the safe-guards, the Council would serve a useful purpose to promote a sort of regional integration.

According to the 'North-Eastern Council Act, 1971, the President shall nominate one of the Members of the Council to be the Chairman and if he deems necessary, he shall nominate another to be the Vice-Chairman.

The high ranking officers such as a Secretary, a Planning Officer and a Security Officer have been provided for under the Act to man the Secretariat of this Council and the staff shall function under the direction, supervision and control of the Chairman.

The North-eastern Areas (Re-organisation) Act, 1971 introduced in the Lok Sabha was passed by that House on December 22, 1971. The Act regularised the Re-organisation of the Region into five States—Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Nagaland and Tripura and two Union Territories of Mizoram and Arunachal Pradesh. The North-Eastern Council was designed to be an Advisory Body with its decision having nonmandatory sanction. Its formation was on the basis of the consensus of opinion levelled by the leaders concerned in the areas. It would provide integrated development plans for individual States and Union Territories and separate regional plans for all the North-eastern areas.

### **State Inauguration**

The full State, Meghalaya, was finally inaugurated on January 21, 1972 by the Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi at Polo Ground. Shillong looked gayish, arches and gates having been erected by various parties and thousands came marching

on to attend the solemn ceremonies. Cars, jeeps and trucks loaded with flags and hundreds of persons waving flags added to the charm of the day, other parks being decked with numerous decorations. The town roused with singings and music and fire-works illuminating for a couple of nights. The people were jubilant to hear the welcome and Inaugural addresses. The day gave a land-mark to the history how this State came into being. And along with that new trends and dimensions evolved, new heights to climb up.

Opening up the inauguration, Captain Sangma exhorted the building up of Meghalaya 'in which the people may enjoy a standard of living consistent with self-respect, to inculcate in our youth a proper sense of values and self-responsibility and to afford equal opportunities to all our people, to participate to the full is for life of our new State'. Sri M.M. Choudhury conveyed the good wishes from the Assam Government. The Prime Minister dwelt on the paramount need to further integrated development plans for the benefit of the North-eastern region as a whole—on the occasion when the long cherished aspirations of the Hill people were fulfilled on this auspicious day and similarly conveyed a sense of appreciation to the Meghalaya authorities for sparing no pains on their part to accommodate lakhs of refugees during Bangladesh crisis. The public celebrations came to a close with the performance of colourful tribal dances. Just during the mid-night, solemn ceremonies were held in which the Ministers were sworn in. Church bells pealed forth and resounded in which groups of people had gathered in chapels and churches to offer their prayers. On 21st morning, the members of the Legislative Assembly were sworn in which was followed by the holding of a ceremony marking the parting of the Meghalaya Police Force from their parent Assam counterparts.

The elections to the Assembly occurred shortly after. In the final arrangement 50 out of 60 seats of the Assembly are reserved for scheduled tribes (Garo, Khasi and Jaintia) and 10 for open contest. The APHLC was returned; other parties represented were the Hill State People's Democratic Party and the Congress, besides the Independent. Up-till July 1973, the APHLC totalled 38 members.

### **North-eastern Council—Inaugural Session**

When the Council came into force on July 1, 1972 the Governor of Assam, Nagaland and Meghalaya was nominated its Chairman, the Council consisting of members with the Chief Minister of Assam, Meghalaya, Manipur, Tripura, the Lieutenant-Governor and the Chief Minister of Mizoram and the Chief Commissioner of Arunachal Pradesh and one of his Counsellors. A Secretary of the Council would function from its Secretariat at Shillong, three main advisers having been named, drawn from the Union Finance Ministry, the Union Planning Ministry and the Union Defence Ministry. Nagaland until then had not decided to become its member.

There was considerable delay to working out this Federal scheme. In 1971 prior to the passing of the final Act, questions were raised to observers in the intended constituent States as to the scope of its functions, a consensus of opinion was being reached that it should function as advisory rather than mandatory body with which the Centre had agreed to make concessions with the bargaining States and territories, a single cadre of All India Services having been abandoned, so also the original proposal to amend Article 371 to vest special power and responsibility in the Governor.<sup>1</sup>

Such fears were allayed by Prime Minister during the inauguration of the Council on November 7, 1972 when she said:

‘It is not a super government; it does not abridge the powers of the State and the Union Government. It is an advisory and not a supervisory body. The Central Government will not use the Council to interfere with the affairs and functions of the various Governments of this region.’

The inaugural Session was held at the Central Library Hall Auditorium, Shillong, in which the constituent States and Territories were represented by the Chief Minister of Assam, Manipur, Meghalaya, Tripura, the Lt-Governor of Mizoram and the Chief Commissioner of Arunachal Pradesh. The Prime Minister announced that the Centre would provide an amount of Rs. 50 crores to the Council for the implementation of such

1. *The Statesman*, August 2, 1972.

projects as would be taken up separately from the funds that the constituents would provide for their own from the Centre.

The Chairman, Mr. B.K. Nehru, expressed a sense of gratefulness to the Prime Minister for her keen interest in the region as a whole. The region, according to him, irrespective of the vast multi-racial and linguistic heterogeneity, would have thrown quite a good scope for common developmental grounds and particularly in the very fitness of things, this sort of regional co-operation should have been a great necessity to make the Council develop into a strong and competent body to effect co-ordination on economic development to the advantage of all. The four Chief Ministers in the Council, the Lt-Governor of Mizoram and the Chief Commissioner of Arunachal Pradesh also spoke and touched some aspects of the problems.

At this first session, the Council was resolved to make use of the funds for which the Centre had made available towards launching projects of regional character for the fourth five-year plan. Further the Council was agreed to giving priority to the development of transport and communications. Approach was being made with the Planning Commission for requisitioning necessary assistance and know-how 'in identifying programmes as well as drawing up projects for the regional planning'. The Member States and Union Territories were asked to communicate proposals as regards to plans which would benefit more than one Member and a meeting of Planning Secretaries of all constituent units would take up such schemes for discussion before submitting to the Council for consideration. The office will continue to function from Shillong until decided otherwise in the days to come.



## *Chapter 10*

### **DISTRICT COUNCILS AND ADMINISTRATION**

The three districts in the State have respective District Councils. Let us treat first of the functions of the District Council in the Garo Hill District.

The District Council was inaugurated by Mr. Bishnuram Medhi, Chief Minister, Assam on April 14, 1953 at Tura after its members were returned during the election held in February 1953, the total number of members being 30, 6 of whom were nominated. The District Council since its inception sought to properly use its power in the light of the provisions of the Sixth Schedule. Important departments are functioning under its aegis. The important Acts passed by the Council comprise the following :—

1. Collection of Taxes— Garo Hill District (Carts, Cycles and Boats) Taxation Act 1953;
2. Garo Hills District (Professions, Trades, Callings and Employment) Taxation Regulation, 1956.
3. Garo Hills District (Trading by Non-Tribals) Regulation, 1956;
4. Garo Hills District (Residence Toll) Regulation, 1961.

Irrespective of difficulties presented by topography and others, a large measure of cooperation has been obtained by the District Council from the public in implementing the above taxation measures. Collection of a house tax in both laskarships and mouzadarships has continued unlike the Khasi and the Jaintia Hills District Councils in which this tax, the non States had been accustomed to paying to the Government during the

long decades of British administration has been kept in abeyance. The house tax in Garo hills presently is one of the important sources of revenue to the District Council. More than that, the implementation of the above Acts has helped create other additional sources of income.

The District Council exercises administrative jurisdiction over more than 100 sq. miles of Reserved forest of the Council in addition to more than 1,850 sq. miles of unclassed forest (a.king) and through two Acts, Forest Act Garo Hills (District Forest Act), 1958 and the Garo Hills District (Awil Fees) Act, 1960, the forests of the District Council have been maintained properly and the forest revenue collected through the staff of the Department.

The Transport branch of the Council functions in the District since its inception; it came into being in 1953. Daily bus service now operates on the Tura-Goalpara road and cater to the other local bazar requirements for the public. The Civil Work branch is instrumental in the construction of buildings and roads in the charge of an Assistant Engineer. There is a Rural Development branch which runs vital projects related to the construction of rural roads on community self-help basis, extension of water supply, village re-grouping system, and looks to the development of village councils. The functions of the relief and rehabilitation branch are no less insignificant in accommodating thousands of refugees from modern Bangladesh during the past one decade.

From 1961 the district Council has taken over all primary schools in which more than half a lakh of children receive instructions, in over more than 1,200 primary school institutions.

The Council has other arrangements for markets. It derives income in the form of revenue returned by market the authorities and levies imposed on the traffic of goods; for instance a small and reasonable levy is charged upon per maund of cotton-sold or per stock of cloth in the market, instructions having been laid down from time to time to maintain the standard of cleanliness in the markets. Other effective policy decisions have been enforced.

Notwithstanding difficulties caused by inadequate means of communication, lack of suitable jeepable roads, location of far-flung villages and topographical complications, the properly

organised Garo District Council has been able to run the administration on progressive lines. The construction of roads and implementation of huge projects, however, are the responsibility of the State Government. The District Council was instrumental in the establishment of the Tura College, now Government College. Its court now deals with all civil cases and appeals lie to it from the village councils which have been prone to 'try suits and cases involving customary laws and practices and petty criminal cases falling within the purview of the customary laws'.<sup>1</sup>

The District Council at present further seeks to reconstitute village councils in the District and enables them play more vital role in social concerns and other development works. The functions and membership have hitherto been defined in context of the District Council Constitution of Village Council Act, 1958. The members according to the Act shall be returned by election and others to be nominated.

On the 21st anniversary of the District Council held at Tura, at a solemn ceremony on April 14, 1973, a review on the progress so far made indicated that 1,200 schools and 1,000 kms. of roads were administered by the Council. Irrespective of all efforts made, the District Council has to work more vigorously yet to minimising jhumming in their village re-grouping programme through education and adopt other realistic measures. Garos have shown themselves capable of working out their District Council under the leadership of the Chairman and members of the Council in implementing such constructive policies and largely accepted programmes.

The infrastructure of the village composition is worthy of note for which it might be relevant to quote O.D. Shira's article as appeared in the *Implanter* of January 21, 1972 :

"In the long history of the Laskars, we have no evidence to prove that the office should be hereditary or that it was at any time held or claimed as such. During the days of the British, the Government found it expedient and beneficial to appoint powerful and influential Garos as Laskars.

1. For details, see Tura Govt. College Magazine, Krishode Marak, *A Glimpse of the Garo Hills District Council*, pp. 4-9.

In later years, however, the system of election was introduced to have the Laskars elected to office and it witnessed experimentation of both the methods of election, namely the Direct and the Indirect Methods with a view to finding talented and capable men to hold this simple but important post. The Nokmas in the system of Indirect election, selected men of their choice to the office of the Laskar and in the case of Direct Method, members of the public of a Laskar's jurisdiction exercised their rights of election. The present practice adopted by the District Council is to appoint the Laskars in consultation with the Village Council and some members of the public. This can be said to be reversion to the original British system of appointing Laskars with a modification.

The Laskars, who try both civil and criminal cases of minor nature, are mostly the revenue officers. All proceedings of Laskars are viva-voce and they decide cases in open durbar, in which no professional pleader or mukhtar is allowed to appear. Laskars are empowered to summon meetings of the villagers for settlement of disputes and they preside over them. They are also empowered to impose fines upto the maximum of Rs. 50.00. The Laskars are assisted in their duties by Sardars and Nokmas. They often act as rural Police and at the same time as honorary magistrates.

In cases where there was grounds to believe that a decision is biased or that there has been miscarriage of justice, appeals from the decisions of the Laskars often lie to the courts of either the District Council or the Deputy Commissioner of the district.

The Laskars of Garo Hills whose present strength is 55 receive no salary, but following more or less the principle of pay, . . . they are remunerated on the basis of the amount of house tax they collect. All the Laskars of the district except those of Mouza No. 1 are paid commissions at the rate of 15 per cent, in terms of rupee, out of the house tax collected within their jurisdiction. The Laskars of Mouza No. 1 have the privilege of receiving the commission at enhanced rate of Rs. 19.00 per hundred.

The Laskars have to be well conversant with the customary laws of the Garos to enable them to try cases. They are also required to be financially sound as they are to handle a huge amount of tax-money, which is the revenue of the State. Usually the Laskars are both influential and powerful men. Not only that they occupy a place of respect and honour in their own jurisdiction as executive and administrative heads, it has also on record that some of them emerged even as great figures of the district. Late Sri Janggin Sangma, Laskar of Tura, perhaps deserves mention here. Sri Sangma though did not know much of education, rose and became a prominent figure by dint of his capacity and ingenuity. He was honoured with the title of Member of the British Empire during the British rule and he was also elected at one time as Member of the Assam Legislative Assembly to represent the people of Garo Hills. From among the laskars of the present day, mention may be made of Sri Moniram Marak who himself being a Laskar, is also a Member of the Garo Hills District Council, the authority which can appoint and remove laskars of Garo Hills including him.

In the district where no Panchayat system has been introduced, the Laskars have played an important role over the years and are expected to continue to function as units of administration in the democratic set-up of India where de-centralisation of powers prevails. The existence of Laskars saved to a great extent accumulation of cases in the courts of the district and also avoided delay or denial of justice to the people living in far-flung areas.

Now that Meghalaya has attained full-fledged Statehood, the time is perhaps ripe to give proper thought to the role of the Laskars and to redefine their powers and function. It is for the Meghalayans specially for the Garos and the State Government to consider whether more powers should be given to them".

Similarly the Jaintia Dalois exercising assigned judicial powers and performing rural Police functions in context of the provisions of the Act, were to repress all disorders, arrest criminals, report to the Deputy Commissioner occurrences of

crimes, violent deaths and serious accidents, dispose of cases charged with injury not exceeding Rs. 50/-, house trespass, theft and minor occurrences. Daloi could impose a fine for any offence and was competent to try up to the extent of Rs. 50/-. The Sirdars in British villages (Khasi Hills) also hold similar powers. But the status of the heads of the Khasi States was on a different footing. 'The court of the Syiem may try any offence under the Indian Penal Code or under any other law for the time being in force within the respective locality except those punishable with death, transportation or involving a punishment of five years imprisonment which may arise within the limits of its locality in which the Khasis who reside or hold land within its locality are concerned. Provided that Syiems' courts shall have jurisdiction over non-Khasis who voluntarily invoke or submit to its jurisdiction'. (*Administration of Justice Rules, 1937*).

Experience in the present context has, however, shown that the District Council is more adaptable to a single village system of administration; the Khasi Hills District Council on the other hand has been facing many difficulties owing to the States system which exists.

The problem had been enhanced due to the growing opposition to the enforceability of some Acts of the District Council such as the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forests) Act, 1958, the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills (Management and Control of Markets Act 1953 and others.

We may recollect that during the middle of 1966, the District Congress Committee submitted a memorandum on the plea that 'one-third of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills was known as partially Excluded Area under the Government of India Act. In either case neither the Central Legislature nor the Assam Legislature had jurisdiction and authority over them. Three-fourths of Shillong itself was under the Myllem State'. The Committee pressed for the creation of the Khasi and Jaintia State as discernible from the Eastern Frontier Hill State. A Memorial of June 15, 1968 by the Concord of the Syiems claimed that full expenditure for running their respective administration and disbursement in the form of emoluments for school teachers, improvement of *hats* and markets was met from their respective State budgets. On the Agreement entered

to in August 1948, the Memorial urged that the conditions of the Agreement were inviolable in letter and spirit that 'those terms and conditions neither modified nor any new arrangement made so far between parties thereto be not lost sight of and should and ought to be respected and given full effect to in the re-organisation of the administrative set up of these Hill Areas and that the rights of all Khasi Syiemships and of the people living therein as envisaged by the solemn Agreement executed should be fully protected and preserved'.

One very important development in this connection which may deserve our attention is the fact that the de-recognition of the Maharajas who had maintained a subsidiary alliance with the Government of India does not apply to the 25 Khasi States which maintain their position as democratic institutions and their means of income being limited ones unlike the Maharajas who were virtual landlords and Zamindars. The democratic character featuring their institutions in the case of the Khasi States in respect of the election of the State Durbars and their councillors, its intrinsic part in the tribal way of life, the limited power of the chief are unique characteristics of the Khasi States. The Khasi States offer a unique solitary case in this respect.

Certain new measures however of social service, equitable administration and care of the public reconstruction programmes seems to be essential in order that the Khasi States should be in position to continue for many more years to come. The progressive outlook of these States blended with efforts at modernisation of certain institutions will definitely contribute to make them worthy of functions.

The over-all summing of the situation is as follows—The problem inherent in a three-tier system of administration which prevails in the Khasi Hills District whereas the Jaintia and the Garo Hills Districts share a much more uniform pattern in that there is no intermediary body between the District Council and the Laskars in case of Garo Hills and the Dalois in Jaintia Hills. These village chiefs enjoy the powers which have been defined and which are at par with the other tribal chieftainships. In the Khasi Hills there are the State organisations headed by Syiems whose status were recognised in the treaties conducted with the British Government. The de-recognition of the Maharajas has also not affected the Khasi States. The

States own large plots of land and forest in their respective territorial jurisdictions and maintain their markets. In the other two districts, lands and forests have been described to be vested in the jurisdiction of the District Councils. Besides, higher magisterial powers had been granted to Syiems in different categories whereas the other Chiefs in other districts have the powers of the village courts. In many cases these chieftains along with the Laskars and Dalois abide by the old customary laws, whereas the District Council and the State Legislature are established on the basis of the modern representative form of Government.

In this connection, the inherent defects in the customary laws of succession to the office in the Khasi Syiemships may be pointed out. The problems assume propensity on the occasions of succession disputes and there are various modes of interpretation. Even during the days of the British administration, this problem was pin-pointed but actually no reforms into the system had been carried out. It is necessary that the areas of coordination be found out. This accounts for the remarkable progress made in the Garo and the Jaintia Hills Districts.

Conditions, however, prove more applicable to the working of the District Council in Jaintia Hills. The Jowai Autonomous District Council came into being subsequent from the agitations current since 1957 for a separate District Council.

The Jowai Autonomous District Council (now Jaintia Hills District Council) was formed in 1967, its members having been returned during the elections held in 1967: out of the 12 seats, 10 seats were filled by the APHLC whereas 2 seats were held by the Jaintia United Front. Conditions for the working of the District Council appear to be quite congenial and since inception, apart from the Acts declared enforceable by the erstwhile United K and J Hills District Council, an addition made in the Jowai Autonomous District was the Management and control over land and Assessment and Collection of Revenue (Amendment) Regulation), 1971; the administration of forests is also in conformity with the provisions of the United Khasi and Jaintia Hills Autonomous District (Management and Control of Forests) Act, 1958 and the Rules made thereunder. In respect of education, the Assam Government transferred primary education to the erstwhile autonomous District Council in April 1962, the Assistant Revenue Officer of the United Khasi-Jaintia



District Council posted at Jowai, taking over charge from the Deputy Inspector of Schools but in respect of the text-books, the regulations of the State Government were still followed in 1971 in which year there were 458 teachers against 9,290 pupils. From inception the Council has got 22 roads of short distance mostly approach roads and maintained three bazar buses for facilitating short traffic and transport especially small traders and villagers. As of 1971, there were three markets under its control whereas over the private and elaka markets, the Council had a partial control only. The Council at present has no house tax enforced in consequence of a no house tax campaign which thereby brought about exemption of house tax to the erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills District but this is only a sort of abeyance as house tax has not been officially abolished. The District Council has powers to try offences punishable with imprisonment for a term not exceeding 10 years under the I.P.C. On market arrangement, Council markets are leased out to the highest bidder for collection of tolls and a small percentage of the revenue say 5% to 10% is given to the Managing Committee which look after sanitation, cleanliness etc. of the market. But over private or elaka markets, the Council has only partial control. All professional and land taxes are administered by the Council.<sup>1</sup>

In the District Council elections held in February 1973, the APHLC again was returned and swept the polls in 10 out of 16 constituencies. The APHLC put up candidates only in 15 constituencies. The election results were at variance from the 1967 results when first District Council session was held. There would be three nominated members, the anticipation being that they would be appointed on the recommendation of the ruling party. Recently five in the Opposition belong to the Movement and one is Independent. The picture is unlike Khasi Hills District Council in which among total elected 29, APHLC has 12, Hill State People's Democratic Party 11, Congress 4, Independent 2 but the Hill State People's Democratic Party being backed up by other groups, formed the majority in consequence of the election results held in 1972. In Garo Hills the position is—total elected 27, APHLC 21, Congress 3, Independents 3—others.

1. D.O. No. JAD/Con/Gen/10/70/17 date Sept. 6, 1971 from Mr John Deng Pohrmen, Chief Executive Member, District Council, Jowai Autonomous District, Meghalaya.

nil. In all the Councils, nominated members were associated in consequence of the recent amendments under the Assam Reorganisation (Meghalaya) Act, 1969 and the North-Eastern Areas Reorganisation Act (1971), by which there are three nominated members in the Garo Hills District Council totalling 30 members, three in the Jaintia Hills District Council totalling 19 members and one in Khasi Hills Council totalling 30 members.

By another notification the two District Councils have come to be known by new names, Khasi Hills District Council and Jaintia Hills District Council in place of the erstwhile United Khasi and Jaintia Hills and Jowai District Councils respectively.

*Jaintia Hills District.* The Jaintia Hills had hitherto been governed as a Sub-division for more than a century. The developments taking place much more recently resulting from the creation of Jowai District Council and other administrative measures, qualified its upgradation to the District, the matter having received necessary consideration. The inauguration of this new District took place on 22nd February 1972 at a ceremony held at Jowai when during a speech by the Chief Minister, Capt. W.A. Sangma, the issue relating to the utilisation of potentialities of the area and acceleration of developmental projects, received emphasis. Mr. B.B. Lyngdoh and Mr. John Deng Pohrmen also addressed at the functions. The cultural show which included local dances and incantations was a colourful one.

*New Sub-Divisions.* In January 1973, in which the State covers one year of its existence, two new sub-divisions have been added to the State, Nongstoin sub-division in Khasi Hills District and Simsangiri sub-division in Garo Hills District. It is expected all these creations will accelerate tempo of development. The creation of new sub-division and increase of electoral constituencies, State and District Council, will largely help localise and intensify welfare and development projects and enable masses in interior villages participate in such responsibilities.

## **Chapter 11**

### **TRADE AND OTHER RELATIONS**

Influxes of Garos and other refugees from Bangladesh side have been reported from time to time since the Partition of the country. According to Kamaleswar Sinha, 'the Bengal District of Mymensing seemed to be the home of about 43,000 Garos most of whom were on the fringe of the Garo Hills'.<sup>1</sup> Garos who fled from East Pakistan and settled in the District since Independence were rehabilitated by the Government. Christian mission also extended relief measures to the Garos in the camps. On the other hand, local leaders are helping them with land to grow food crops on the terms and conditions only as executing agents of the Government of India. The State has provided a token amount of relief and rehabilitation with the assistance of the Central Government.<sup>2</sup> It was known that many Khasi and Jaintia villages exist in Bangladesh where people are engaged in the cultivation of crops such as betel-vines, areca-nuts and fruits and carrying on trade. Besides, a large number of Bengalees have been rehabilitated at Shillong, facilities having been extended to them for housing, etc.

The Partition hit hard on the border people: 'the fruit plantations in the southern slopes are situated in areas of deep precipices and it is difficult to have direct communication with market centres in the uplands. Because trade facilities are not available, the local produce such as fruits and crops worth lakhs of rupees, are left to rot in the plantation. Moreover staple food crops such as rice which was obtained from Sylhet is not

1. *Meghalaya, Triumph of the Tribal Genius*, p. 30

2. H.W. Sten, *Meghalaya Year Book*, 1971, p. 25.

now available due to the closure of markets and reports of both food scarcity and near starvations are heard from time to time to the extent that the people feed themselves with wild vegetables and roots. The construction of motor roads has been found to be of meagre help to the border people though it is doubtless of help to the people residing in the other parts of the District. Moreover the present road development has been found more useful in linking this District with other Districts than of giving direct help to the border people.

They have little opportunity to gathering their produce and sending it to Shillong. Some sections of the War people have already left their homes and started cultivation towards the Bhoi area in the north. The situation is further deteriorated by the absence of rice or millet lands in the War interiors. 'The trade of betels and nuts and tez leaves which usually exceeded the volume of income yielded by potato is now limited both in production and circulation'.<sup>1</sup>

A commentary entitled Meghalaya newsletter in the *Calcutta Statesman* dated August 2, 1971 held this view—'the present volume of trade and output is a trickle compared to pre-Independence figures, since the economy was oriented toward the East Bengal plains and the available riverine facilities. An official dossier records that the prices of produce sank to unbelievably low levels. Worse still, there was no one to lift the produce in the absence of communications to alternative markets in the rest of India. Attempts to develop a food crop economy and diversify agriculture, the dossier says, were unsuccessful because suitable land was not available. A people specialising in orchard cultivation were at a distinct disadvantage in having to learn the technique of food crop cultivation. With the opening of a few vital roads alternative markets were found, but transporting the produce to the focal points posed a problem. Transport by headloads was primitive and possible only in the non-monsoon period'. This problem persisted during all these years, all trade in various articles having been suspended except for a restricted arrangement for supply of limestone from the south to feed a cement undertaking at Chatak. But the re-opening of a few border *hats* between December 1970 and March 1971 agreed to, seemed to suggest

1. Bareh, *History and Culture of the Khasi People*, pp. 466-467.

the fact that both sides shared in the trouble arising from the closure of the market. Thus after a prolonged negotiation upto the quarter ending in March 1971, a few border *hats* were declared opened for transaction in listed articles only. Before the other developments ensued, the maintenance of relations was upset by the Bangladesh affairs bringing with it influxes of refugees into the State.

The influx reached unprecedented pitch during the middle of May 1971, when eleven refugee camps were declared opened in the Garo Hills in addition to those located at Pynursla, Dawki, Balat and other places in the Khasi-Jaintia Hills. Each camp was proposed to accommodate minimum 5,000 and maximum 50,000 people. Relief measures in the shape of transport, building, medicines, food-stuffs and other facilities were accelerated to enable Government cope with this complex exigency. However, it was the opinion of many that the approach to this problem should be on humanitarian grounds, although the State had already been pressed with many problems like population pressure, employment and others. The influx of the swarms of refugees continued until the outbreak of the war. The Union Government had already committed to extend help to those States which shared in shouldering this difficulty but the State Government was also bisected with problems such as shortage of medical and technical personnel. The situation had also necessitated Meghalaya the raising of a special Police and the creation of a separate portfolio in the cabinet.

Irrespective of the problems to which they were faced, the Government promptly acted to reach the camps' relief measures.

Although the situation was ephemeral as the refugees were to return home after a short while, it is necessary however to pin-point some trends of public reaction on this matter. True this situation was viewed with concern in many circles. In this connection the Tribal Youth Welfare Association which sponsored a hartal on June 9, 1971 and *Ka Synjuk lang ki Rangbah Shnong* comprising elders from the towns of Shillong, Nongthymmai and Mawlai, expressed their desire to reduce the number of the evacuees to the minimum in view of the fact that the tribal population was comparatively of static growth and weak enough to resist large migration contacts. The refugees from Shillong sheltered with their kith and kin ought to be minimised in number for which the Government of Assam,

issued necessary instructions for the proper registration of the refugees with the help of the localities and wards in Shillong by organising teams of volunteers to undertake that work. Yet the Government's position was also tightened with problems mounting up owing to the mountain terrain, difficult water supply position, absence of proper means of communication, shortage of funds although the Government was doing its best to extend prompt relief measures. It was also pointed out that Meghalaya is a sensitive area, that its economy, deteriorating since Partition not yet recovered from the strains, was aggravated again by these influxes, that roads were unfavourable to meet transit and haltage points, that water supply position was tightened one and such matters. Such measures to accommodate more refugees would jeopardise the conditions of the infant State. The much that could be done however was to isolate the camp from population centres and to keep in abeyance any scheme for the preparation of electoral rolls lest many illegal cases were by mistake entertained. At the same time there was need to prevent congestion of diseases. An extract from the *Statesman* (Calcutta) dated August 2, 1971 may be appropriate in this regard—'The influx of over 2,50,000 refugees has more than doubled the population of the border area. Prices had risen and destruction of jungle wealth and vegetation had led to local resentment and health hazards'. Towards November 1971, the population of refugees accommodated in the State shot up to 7,00,000 persons.

The Indo-Pakistan war and the liberation of Bangladesh ushered in a new chapter of history. The refugees have returned to their home. The liberation of Bangladesh and the North-eastern Areas Re-organisation which came simultaneously may be described, to contain germs for better understanding and relationship. A new chapter has opened for communication of idea and maintenance of other links to ensure the stability and prosperity of the once rich border.

Although steps had been taken to normalise trade relations with Bangladesh consequent of the stipulation of a Trade Agreement, conditions have now not permitted for the operation of full and free trade on the plea that the trade be suspended for sometime.<sup>1</sup> This has conditioned the border people with

1. *Implanter*, June 2, 1973, p. 5.

many problems. The State Government has adopted a relief scheme now in operation and the Centre has also been approached to furnish necessary assistance in this connection as of the first half of 1973. There is no doubt that the border people are greatly handicapped with this suspension of trade. The Government has undertaken schemes of transport subsidy of essential commodities to the border people. Supplies of timber and limestone at the state level to Bangladesh have however been, covered in the Agreement.

## **PERSPECTIVES**

This chapter lays down a few perspectives in which as much as possible, a few answers have been provided. The problems are categorised into social, cultural, economic and administrative in the light of the current thinking.

The household organisation, as discussed earlier, underwent significant changes during the long decades of the British administration. Christianity has nothing contradictory with the inheritance pattern except that it has deprived Christian women from their position as care-takers of rituals as in their case, the conduct of Christian rites has passed to males. We have to examine in what manner the stages of the transformation have affected the position and power of males and avuncular personages especially in respect of their past position as protectors of the household. There is no doubt that the matrilineal organisation owing to such changes which loom large, has shown certain irregularities and has not conformed to its original norms in which the maternal uncle, exercised influence over the conduct of the household members as true guardians and protectors. We have made efforts to examine the various systems obtained from these hills. The system as it occurs with other paternal institutions, has both merits and defects. It is only in Shella (Khasi War area) that both sons and daughters inherit property. We cannot say with any certainty if in Garo Hills, the matrilineal character still keeps its ancient colour with slight variations occurring from place to place in view of the social transformation which had become of necessity since the entry of the first British administrators. No doubt in any situation, the turn in which virile clans and families are transformed into loosely organised units, where the family discipline



is wrecked down out, is a sad story. In the tradition-bound systems, priesthood and chief<sup>7</sup> ship are maintained on the matrilineal customary laws irrespective of other changes. The system is integrated which the other traits of polity and culture as far as it applies into the laws of inheritance, succession and land tenure. In a previous chapter, we have pointed out that other deviations from the original system are minor ones.

Education has assisted the present transformation to take some shape at administrative, social, economic and other levels. The growth of literature is its outcome. Literature was born after the language was put down to writing. The new born literature showed manifestation of its growth in the number of primers, readers, text-books, as well as the translations it possessed. The growth of journalism was at a later stage. What is remarkable is that cultural orientation has also played substantial role in literature, and with its growth, some cultural values kept intact, found out a place for perpetuation and thus were prevented from being obsolete. This is an indirect contribution of Western education.

Whatever intrinsic in the laws, customs, institutions, arts, dances, songs, proverbs, folk-lore, sports, games and other factors of cultural heritage of the Hills people, Garo, Jaintia, Khasi and other distant tribes, has to be perpetuated in literature, stage, film, photography and other means and whatever good from modern industry, education, constitutional government should be utilised without jeopardising the cultural life with its intrinsic traits, features, values, qualities which have persisted through the ages. The loss from the old values has been compensated by the gains we have now from literature, education, industry and administration.

We have mentioned some changes or modifications which have been adopted in dietary, dress, house building, sanitation and others. The growth of weaving, a recent development, among women-folk in the Garo Hills, seems to have come in consequence of trade contacts. It has also grown to supplement cotton-ginning in which a number of new apparels have been used and circulated. On the Khasi uplands, considerable woven apparels and costume have been supplied from villages in Kamrup plains such as Palasbari. In the past, trade pacts appear to have been made in which Khasis supplied iron goods

and agricultural produce in exchange for costume. However, incentives to increase weaving works in the hills seem so indispensable in which original patterns, styles and motifs may be applied.

The growth of social vices such as corruption, bribery, unlicensed brewery, illegal trade have to be assessed properly. We are also concerned with imitating the good points in western life and of discarding bad ones. The evils of neomodernism have to be distinguished from the other social evils such as corruption, bribery and growth of nepotism. Similarly position or class consciousness is opposed to equalitarianism, a basic concept of tribalism. The service of an organisation called 'Ka seng pynduh kiad,' or drinking prohibition campaign ought to have been more stabilised with a view to mitigate addiction habits and drunkenness in the country. The organisation has used various forums and issued various pamphlets to pin-point the evils and sought assistance from Government and village authorities to reduce licences. The banning of a teer game by the Meghalaya Government was another realistic step taken with a view to mitigate social evil which had infested with the spread of the game. The game of more recent origin captured the glammers of large masses of people ; it was a sort of gambling through the results procured in archery with easy chances to getting money. The people cultivated so much interest with the forchances and other attractions of the game. The banning was preceded by an Act passed by the Assam Legislative Assembly. The game was so much intoxicating and heart winning.

Warring with social evils concerns not only voluntary organisations but also the church<sup>1</sup> and Christian organisations.

The Literature and cultural organisations disseminate ideas about cultural heritage. The intrinsic requirements of the present age, and provisions of incentives to the rising generation, need special emphasis. Studies in arts and culture, sociology, museology and other means are of tremendous value.

The perpetuation comprises indigenous arts, music, songs, dances, traditional literature, modern paintings and

1. Of various denominations—Presbyterian, Catholic, All Saints, Church of God, Church of Christ, Baptist, Dissenters, etc , etc.

drawings, some local aspects of traditional craftmanships and sports and games. Folk-dance, Garo and Khasi is rich, conveying numerous expressions and performed in transition of musical arts with the traditional instruments; it is of course regrettable that most of the creative arts have been forgotten.

The part which literature, stage, film, museum and photography play in perpetuating culture, has to be properly assessed. In respect of the stage, the adaptation of plays to historical, social, current and primeval characteristics ought to be appropriate. Creative stages exert educational lessons and true to life.

No social organisation in the State has developed proper museological interest. Specimens of what may be termed art-treasures, such as the ancient match-locks and artillery, coins, etc. have been conspicuous by their absence. Photographic representations of sculpture, the wonderful stone bridges, ancient palaces are necessary and with the help of the good artists, presentations of them in painting and drawing are useful. Other exhibits—ornaments, crafts, weapons, tools and implements are necessary for museological preservation. An Art-gallery gives expression to the cultural heritage.

Scholastic works to cover multifarious subject-matter in history, sociology, political science, economics and sciences as well, are most valuable and contain seeds for the real socio-cultural and economic reconstruction works.

At various educational forums, the need has been pointed out to improve curriculums, provisions of qualitative teaching patterns and equipment of teaching aids, books and libraries and creative extra-curricular incentives. The condition is deplorable as we find many villages have no good buildings and class rooms and other provisions. The need to improve academic standards at all levels has been pointed out. There are other problems—a fraction only of examinees are capable of showing standards as necessary whereas the mass are much below. Another question arises, how far employment prospects can be created—industrial, vocational, technical and general in such measure that they will be in proportion with the present student population under instructions. Provisions of land or equipment instead of jobs might be useful. But a saying is 'man does not live by bread alone'. School community and

students have to be inculcated with the sense of values, discipline, noble traditions, character formation while efforts are to be made to widen the horizon of the knowledge in arts and sciences. Education is not job oriented only but cultural biased. Vocational studies provide a certain nucleus for the growth of small-scale industries. Besides extra games, arts, dance and music may be useful for inclusion in the body of the curriculum. The coming of the Hill University may help improve academic standards and solve problems of the dearth of specialists and scientists at the field in the long run as may be applicable.

Agriculture in the central zone is more advanced. The conditions are now better than they were ten years ago. Much that has been done appears, to have been in the private scale, of course with the help of the Government. The Administration has offered incentives with a view to create more advanced techniques. Much that has been produced consists of traditional items. People have to make more vigorous efforts to produce more in respect of cereals and introduce other new crops. Agro-based industries will be helpful to utilise local fruits and other food stuffs available. About 80% of the population depend on agriculture. Production recently has gone down because in certain areas double cropping was not done. Several incentives have been offered which consist of reclamation of land, subsidizing the transport cost of fertilisers, increase of wet rice lands, etc. The complicated land holdings in Khasi Hill District have barred the District from obtaining recognition from the banking institutions whereas in the Jaintia and Garo districts, lands are vested in the jurisdiction of the District councils. Now the Land Reforms Commission will be appointed shortly to suggest reforms as necessary in consultation with the people.<sup>1</sup> In the Garo Hills, a lot has to be done to overcome jhumming.

It is a paradox that irrespective of the large potentialities that the State offers, large masses of the people comprised in rural sectors, are not better off. As much as I understand, the villagers are well conscious of the resources which abound but because business organisations, transport facilities and other connected institutions have not been properly nurtured, conditions are still deplorable. Incentives to be imparted to develop economic consciousness will largely be helpful. The

1. *Implanter*, May 26, 1973, p. 8.

shifting of the Assam's capital shortly will largely cause displacement and pose new problems for adaptation and adjustment. The problem in turn may create more incentives. The very few industrial enterprises on private sector such as stone crushing, bone meal, mining, furniture and fixture, timber, bakery, motor workshop, saw-mills, electrical, crafts, sweets, soaps and candles, pottery cater mostly to the urban requirements. The coming in of the banks such as Meghalaya Co-operative Apex Bank Ltd., the Shillong Cooperative Urban Bank Ltd., etc., are helpful in financing business enterprises. The Meghalaya Industrial Development Corporation will envisage schemes to analyse minerals and undertakings—medium, mineral, cottage and small scale and sericulture which shall fit in. The said corporation will be in a position to undertake supply of limestones to Bangladesh in coordination with a private mining firm as reported in March, 1973. The Government have at the same time proposed to set up another joint venture under the name of Meghalaya Essential Oils and Chemicals Company Ltd. A project report for the manufacture of calcium carbide and hydrated lime for inclusion in the industrial estates for the State has been prepared by the Industrial Development Bank of India.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, in working out new installations, no irregularity is to be anticipated with regard to organisational pattern, financial implications, morals and other needs. The vacuum has to be met in view of the fact that the only organised industry in the State is the Cements Factory at Cherrapunji.

Agricultural communities need special protection and all grades of co-operatives have to be launched on regular, not experimental stage.

Creative citizenship also deserves emphasis in order that various grades of citizens will be able to discharge such responsibilities and that the society shall reap the best benefits and a socialistic pattern be forged out. There is need that more fields for nation-building be found out and make the State viable in many respects.

1. *Himalaya News Round-up*, Vol. II, No. 4, March, 1973, p. 17  
*Ibid*, Vol. II, No. 4, April, 1973, p. 18.

The motto of self-reliance is a vital rule which determines the all existences of life. Incentives on trade, industrial productivity, utilization of taxation facilities and other sources cannot be created unless public co-operation is utilized at all levels to the maximum.

It is difficult to assess the nature and extent of cooperation that the public shall lend to the Government in some public items of work. Constructive rather than agitational politics are needful in which the people can play a vital role. Decentralisation of municipal powers to the wards and sub-wards for the proper maintenance of sanitation, health, lands might help to create social service and lead to cultivation of public habits, responsibilities, and standards. The wards will resume more responsibility and self-Government entails more public participation.

I have the above observations summed up in a nut-shell, and as this book has been written within a short time, elaborate treatment of all subject-matter cannot be expected at all levels. My humble wish is that the incentives be properly imparted for launching regenerative projects and forging out a suitable situation to bring about an all-round development of the State and the people, in which, statesmen, political scientists, specialists, reformers and nation-builders have a big role to play. The rising generation also needs a very important guidance in this context. There is much more work to be done and other further constructive proposals shall be of great value as we march onward, engaged in a hard struggle to give State a distinctive place in the Union and shed lustre to this great subcontinent of India.



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